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PROUDHONISM AND THE FRENCH WORKING CLASS

1848-1914

BY

JOAN BATTEN WOOD

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
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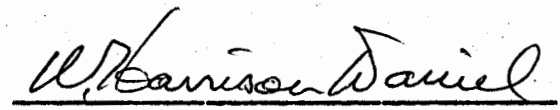
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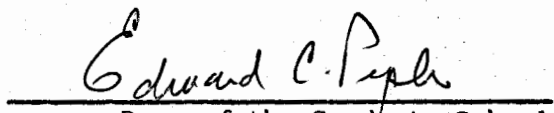

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INTRODUCTION

Conquering causes and dominant trends attract the attention of many historians while unsuccessful movements are neglected or forgotten. Such is unfortunate in the extreme, for these vanquished ideas are often but submerged in the prevailing trends to emerge in the shape of subtle, formative influences on human psychology and the structuring of society. As socialist thought and movements developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century, two diverging currents were readily distinguishable. One, evolving from the teachings of Karl Marx, moved toward increasing centralization and authoritarianism and has become associated in the public mind with the emergence of the Communist State. The other, although less well known, is equally important to a full understanding of the development of socialism. This second tradition of social dissent has been variously labeled libertarianism, mutualism, federalism, and individualistic socialism, but is most often referred to as socialistic anarchism.

This tradition represents not merely a negative, anti-government posture, but is also a positive commitment to man's fundamental, essential nature; the anarchistic "association" is a manifestation of natural human urges. Such a doctrine is grounded in the ultimate meaning of morality--the possibility for each person to realize and fulfill himself as a human individual living in concert with other human beings. Human nature,

le moi, becomes the real source of moral dogma.

The thinking of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon provided the basis for the development of these ideas as they have emerged in movements and theories of social dissent since the mid-1800's. It is the purpose of this paper to trace the influence of Proudhon as a philosopher and, perhaps unwittingly, as a revolutionary personality on the development of libertarian theories and activities, especially those in France in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. France deserves this position of emphasis, not only as the homeland of Proudhon, but also because in France, the various implications of socialistic anarchism were explored with a passion and logical extremity rare elsewhere.¹ France was the center of practical as well as of theoretical anarchism. The Paris Commune was created by men who called themselves Mutualists or Federalists, and anarcho-syndicalism, the only form of anarchism to gain real mass support, developed in France.

After the philosophy of Proudhon is examined in depth, evidences of his involvement in the Revolution of 1848 in Paris, his influence on the beginnings of the French working-class movement and the resulting impact on the International Workingmen's Association will be presented. His philosophy will be shown as providing the theoretical basis for the Paris Commune and the inspiration for the anarchist and syndicalist movements as well as for the beginnings of a Socialist Party in France. At significant junctures, a brief pause will be made in the relating of events and movements in order to study the thinking of influential

¹George Woodcock, Anarchism, Meridian Books (Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing Co., 1962), p. 275.

theoricians who show evidences of Proudhonist tendencies.

Regrettably, not all the desired editions of original sources were readily available in the Library of Congress. In addition, some documents, journals, and pamphlets could not be located in this country. Consequently, more than one edition of some works are cited, and other primary sources of information are quoted from secondary material.

Also some of Proudhon's letters, notebooks, and diaries are as yet unpublished and are in the possession of his descendants. The biographies of Proudhon by George Woodcock and Edouard Dolléans were extremely helpful because these two authors have been permitted access to these unpublished materials. Unless otherwise indicated, translations from the original French are by the author.

CHAPTER I

PROUDHON: THE MAN AND HIS THOUGHT

Thought Evolving from Experiences: Proudhon's Life up to 1848

Proudhon's writing was riddled with ambiguities, obscurities, contradictions, and dangerous incertitudes, and yet his thought possessed a particular tonality, a moral fervor, which assured him the attention of a large public. His influence, which was considerable, was more the influence of spirit than that of a consistent body of doctrine. His profound understanding of the social maladjustment of his time gave him deep insight into the feelings of the displaced artisans and peasants, in whom he was instrumental in instilling a consciousness of themselves as members of the working class. His own origins and life would help to explain this appeal to the French workers. As Henri Arvon has put it, "Proudhon gathered his reflections from the tree of life. He not only issued from the people; he remained attached to them with every fiber of his body and spirit."¹ Out of this attachment his philosophy evolved.

He was born on January 15, 1809, in Besançon in Franche-Comté of peasant-artisan origins. His father, Claude-François Proudhon, was a cooper who later became a brewer and innkeeper, typifying the change of many of the peasantry into petit-bourgeois as French villages became

¹Henry Arvon, L'anarchisme (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1951), pp. 39-40.

towns in the early nineteenth century. The boy educated himself by voracious reading while he was being trained as a type-setter. In 1832 Proudhon made his Tour de France, the customary travel of young printers' apprentices from town to town throughout France to learn the local variations in printing practice and earn the good report of many masters before establishing themselves in their profession.

In 1838 he won the Suard Scholarship awarded by the Academy of Besancon for study in Paris. And it was to the Academy that, in 1840, he dedicated his electrifying Qu'est-ce que la propriété? in which he became the first man to label himself an anarchist. In this work, which contained the germ of all his later theories, Proudhon pinpointed the private ownership and accumulation of property as the source of working-class poverty and degradation. He proposed to rid society of this exploitation by substituting a system of mutual exchange of products by the workers who produced them. Without the possibility of profit, the possibility of accumulating property would simply not exist. As the property-owning class faded out of existence, government would also disappear since its administrative functions would no longer be needed. The population would be composed entirely of working people in possession (not ownership) of their own means of production, including land or home and workshop. The necessary compromises and inter-relationships between individuals and groups of individuals could be administered through voluntary association by means of contract. Fully identifying himself with the working people for whose benefit Qu'est-ce que la propriété? was written, Proudhon looked forward with them to the dawn of this new

age.²

Away from the provincial isolation of Besançon, Proudhon had begun to observe the disturbing social conditions of his time and to relate them to his own thoughts about morality. That his father had remained poor rather than ask of his customers the exorbitant current prices for beer had made a deep impression on the young Proudhon. He wondered how this could be right and fair when others were making profits by unjust means. Was there no reward for honest labor?³ In 1838 he had appended a paragraph to his letter of application for the Suard Scholarship which nearly cost him the award:

Born and bred in the bosom of the working-class, belonging to it still in my heart and affections and above all in common suffering and aspirations, my greatest joy...would assuredly be...to work without cease, through science and philosophy, with all the energy of my will and all the powers of my spirit, for the betterment, moral and intellectual, of those whom I delight to call my brothers and my companions, to be able to propagate among them the seeds of a doctrine which I regard as the moral law of the world...⁴

To a Monsieur Pérennès, he communicated the frustration that he shared with unemployed Paris workers in December, 1839:

Their revolutionary exaltation seems to me bordering on despair. They know that the plan of Paris is drawn by the government in such a way that it can

²Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, What is Property?, trans. by B. R. Tucker (2 vols.; London: William Reeves, 1902).

³Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, "Memoires sur ma vie" (written 1841), printed in Carnets de P.-J. Proudhon (Paris: Librairie Marcel Rivière et cie., 1960), I. p. 5.

⁴Proudhon à l'Académie de Besançon in Oeuvres complètes, 31 mai 1837, IV (Rivière éd. Paris: Librairie des sciences politiques et sociales, 1926), pp. 9-16.

suddenly occupy all the points of the city at the first sign of an uprising; they know that they cannot rise today without being massacred by the thousands. It is that powerlessness which makes them more terrible.⁵

Qu'est-ce que la Propriété?, a second essay on property published in 1841 and dedicated to the revolutionary Blanqui, and a third, Avertissement aux Propriétaires, ou Lettre à M. Considérant in 1842 served to provide Proudhon with a certain notoriety. His Avertissement was seized and the author summoned to appear in court on a charge of conspiracy against the social order. No one appreciated the Besancon courtroom comedy better than the defendant, who played his role to the hilt. He described the scene in a letter to his friend Ackermann. Unable to conceal his delight in disappointing the crowds who had come expecting to see a wild-eyed revolutionary, he presented himself as a quiet, amiable little man who had been mistakenly charged. In flattering terms, he affirmed that his ideas were the same as those of everybody and proceeded to prove this "by scientific arguments so refined, so difficult to follow and rendered in a style which ranged from extreme clarity and simplicity to metaphysical and technological profundity" so that the court understood nothing of what he was saying and acquitted him.⁶ Proudhon's public image was later to become an important issue to him personally and to those whom he influenced.

In Lyons, where he went in 1843 to work for a river transport firm, he became personally involved in the French working-class revolt. The Mutualists there seem to have shared his ideas about the primacy of social

⁵Proudhon, Correspondance (14 tomes; Paris: Librairie internationale, 1875), I, p. 169.

⁶Proudhon à Ackermann, 23 mai 1842, Ibid., II, pp. 43-44.

change, and he saw in them a vindication of his belief that out of the people could arise a movement that would reform society.⁷ Proudhon served as a sort of unofficial corresponding secretary in helping to plan and coordinate activities of the various Mutualist groups. He continued to write, expounding vigorously on the theories he had publicly postulated in 1840, and his reputation as a radical spread. Lesser known revolutionaries, such as Bakunin and Marx, eagerly sought him out on his periodic visits to Paris for intellectual refreshment. That city had already become the revolutionary and socialist capital of Europe with a growing colony of émigrés and expatriates from other countries. It was this kind of intellectual audience that welcomed, and widely discussed, Proudhon's second major work, Système des contradictions économiques ou Philosophie de la misère when it appeared in 1846. Proudhon rejoined his friends in Paris in 1847, coming to work as a revolutionary journalist. His ideas did not penetrate deeply into the working classes until after his involvement in the 1848 uprisings directly introduced him to them. By the time Les confessions d'un révolutionnaire appeared in 1849, he was assured of a wide proletarian audience.

The Moral Basis for Proudhonism

During the 1840's, as throughout his life, Proudhon remained provincial and puritan in perspective. He was quick to note suffering among his

⁷George Woodcock, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), p. 73. The Mutualists were a militant working-class group whose organization was a secret cooperative association based on the principle of mutual self-help. Proudhon was so taken with their ideas and enthusiasm that he later called his own similar doctrine Mutualism.

fellow-creatures and quick to see hypocrisy and contradiction as responsible for that suffering. He wrote in his notebook in October, 1846:

I ask why the law and morality are not in accord.
I wish to make this state of affairs cease; I
swear it, I do a work eminently social and moral.
I make use of the shelter of the law here; I avenge
outraged morality there. While defending myself, I
call the attention of the law-giver to the fundamental points of the social order! And they accuse me!...I represent here reason which is awaiting an accord, which, proceeding by juridical acts, reduces to absurdity the existing social system and avenges the virtue of the hypocrites who blaspheme it--and they accuse me!

The man was preoccupied with right, duty, responsibility and above all, human dignity. Far from being a demagogue or a "membre de foules," he was always ready to show the harm of extreme measures.

He was a man of paradox, basing his system of thought upon man's basic reasonableness, but nonetheless aware of a strain of violence in his own nature. He wrote of his "passion for justice" which tormented him and which he could not justify by philosophical reason.⁹ "Mon malheur" he wrote to Louis Blanc in 1848, "est que mes passions se confondent avec mes idées; la lumière qui éclaire les autres hommes, me brule."¹⁰ His social theory was a product of the eighteenth-century confidence in man's inherent reasonable nature, in the possibility of progress, and in the use of ideas as weapons. His famous criticism of the Revolution of 1848 was that "On a fait une révolution sans une idée." Yet his motivation for formulating a theory was a sympathetic understanding

⁸Proudhon, Carnets, I, pp. 342-343.

⁹Ibid., p. 226.

¹⁰Proudhon, Correspondance, II, p. 305.

of human suffering and a sincere desire to help alleviate it. The contradictory strains of the Enlightenment and of Romanticism are easily detected in the abstract theory which he formulated over a period of years as the moral basis for his concrete plans for a future society.

Proudhon's theory began with an awareness of himself as a reasonable creature. He thought of his ability to reason, to think logically, as a critical function, but at the same time, as his veritable essence, une fonction organisatrice. By virtue of this faculty, he was able to sense dignity in his fellow creatures as in his own person. "I must respect my neighbor," he wrote, "and, if I can, make others respect him, as myself: such is the law of my conscience. In consideration of what do I owe him this respect?...it is his human condition (sa qualité d'homme)."¹¹ This notion of human dignity was primordial. From it, Proudhon derived all his doctrines. Human dignity implies human liberty--the liberty for man to obey the only moral law he knows, that of his own conscience. It also implies the right for him to defend this liberty against anything that would limit it.¹² The only legitimate limit of liberty is reciprocity, the condition of allowing equal liberty to other people which can be expressed in the precept: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."¹³ The individual person is the basic unit in society, but no creature exists naturally isolated from its own kind; therefore, society provides the matrix, the serial order as Proudhon called it, for the function and

¹¹Proudhon, De la justice dans la révolution et dans l'église (3 tomes; Paris: Librairie Garnier Frères, 1858), I, p.182.

¹²This is the basis for Proudhon's justification of revolution.

¹³Proudhon, Solution of the Social Problem, ed. by Henry Cohen (New York: Vanguard Press, 1927), p. 48.

fulfillment of the individual. Marriage provides the best opportunity for this fulfillment, and consequently, the family holds a key position in society.

Proudhon believed the supreme law of society is justice, which causes man to practice reciprocity. The individual conscience is necessarily a member of a collectivity because its objective is the realization of rapport with others under justice. The idea of justice is not revealed by God, but is immanent in man's nature--"a faculty of the soul, the first of all, the one which constitutes the social being, but it is not only a faculty: it is an idea, a rapport, an equation. As a faculty, it is susceptible to development: it is this development which will constitute... the education of humanity."¹⁴

Proudhon would have liked to say here that man is completely rational and would always behave fairly toward his fellow-man, but knowing his own nature and basing his knowledge of other men upon self-awareness extended to them, he could not bring himself to that point. In Contradictions économiques he wrote:

In men are united all the spontaneities of nature, all the instigations of the fatal Being, all the gods and all the demons of the universe. To submit to these powers, to discipline this anarchy, man has only his reason, his progressive thought.¹⁵

According to Proudhon, however, contradiction is the fundamental principle of life and is apparent within the mind of the individual and in his relationships with other people. The ideas of justice, order and harmony

¹⁴Proudhon, De la justice, II, pp. 437-441; I, p. 182.

¹⁵Proudhon, Système des contradictions économiques ou Philosophie de la misère in Oeuvres complètes, I (2 tomes; Rivière éd. Paris: Librairie des sciences politiques et sociales, 1923), Tome I, pp. 252-53.

necessarily presuppose opposites. Just as life implies contradiction, contradiction calls for justice to mediate the conflicting interests of individuals.

The Political Philosophy of Proudhon

In the name of justice, Proudhon formulated his plans for a future society. He rejected existing legal norms as necessary under a system based on justice. He retained the concept of law itself, however, for he saw real, natural laws as the expressions of human reason, the exigencies of the collective conscience. Society has no right to punish, he said, for justice is an act of individual conscience and is, therefore, essentially voluntary. The only legal norm that justice requires to be in force is that contracts must be lived up to. Proudhon could defend contracts because they involve agreements whereby one or more persons voluntarily bind themselves to one or more others to do or not to do something.¹⁶ "That I may remain free, that I may be subjected to no law but my own, and that I may govern myself, the edifice of society must be rebuilt upon the idea of a contract."¹⁷

Inherent within this line of thought is the rejection of the existing state and of property for the same reason; both represent an exploitation of man's freedom, and individuality. "The abolition of exploitation of man by man and the abolition of government of man by man have one and the

¹⁶ Proudhon, Carnets, II, p. 26; also Proudhon, Du principe fédératif et de la nécessité de reconstituer le parti de la révolution (Paris: E. Dentu, 1863), p. 64.

¹⁷ Proudhon, L'idée générale de la révolution au dix-neuvième siècle in Oeuvres complètes, II (Rivière ed. Paris: Librairie des sciences politiques et sociales, 1923), p. 215.

same formula," he said.¹⁸ Proudhon refused to accept any reorganization of society which would merely substitute one set of exploiters for another. Instead, he envisioned a society based upon work, free association and the necessity to honor contracts. He did not see the state as a necessary condition for man's life and believed that the political organization of society should give way to an economic formulation. In the same work in which he defined property as theft, i.e., the exploitation of one man's labor by another, he defined the essential character of government as the public administration of the economy. The political functions he saw as unnecessary and oppressive. His concept of justice when applied to the economy would be nothing more than a perpetual balance operating among the contradictory economic forces. The violation of that natural balance caused the present poverty among men. All the system of justice would require of any citizen would be that he uphold any contracts he made so as not to disturb the economic equilibrium.¹⁹

Proudhon isolated work as the essential attribute of man, that characteristic which distinguishes him from the animals. "L'homme est travailleur, c'est-à-dire créateur et poète."²⁰ And Proudhon believed that work alone creates value--value which rightfully belongs to the worker who creates it. The present system of property ownership was immoral because in practice it represented the exclusion of the worker

¹⁸Proudhon à Pierre Leroux, 13 décembre 1849, quoted in Edouard Dolléans, Proudhon (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1948), p. 221.

¹⁹Proudhon, L'idée générale, p. 302; What is Property?, I, p. 204; De la justice, I, pp. 303, 304.

²⁰Proudhon, Contradictions économiques, I, p. 361.

from that which he had created; in effect, the laborer was prevented from realizing himself fully as a human creature. The just society would require equity in exchange of products and a system of gratuitous credit through which the workers could possess, not own, the means of production and thereby enjoy the products of their labor. Possession would be different from ownership because it would imply no legal rights to use or abuse the property as a means to acquire more. The amount of property each man possessed would be only that necessary to him as a means of production and would, in fact, be considered only as equipment for production and not as property in the present sense of the word. Each man's possession of his own house, land, and tools would be a perpetual stimulant to work and thus to his fulfillment as a human being. This new system would, in reality, be the precept of reciprocity translated into the public economy. Such an economic organization of society would make any coercive political apparatus superfluous.²¹

In addition to the present economic and political systems, Proudhon also rejected public education and the church. As a matter of fact, the only institution which he considered desirable to retain as presently constituted was marriage. He thought the individual could best develop within the close relationships of the family, the rapports, the compromises with other human beings, which are essential to the fulfillment of the personality. He believed that parents could best educate their children themselves and definitely should bear that responsibility until the children were seven or eight years of age. After that time, they

²¹Proudhon, What is Property?, I, p. 124; Contradictions économiques, I, p. 77; Solution of the Social Problem, pp. 18, 48, 60ff.

might be sent to a cooperative school. Proudhon hinted that workers' associations might have an educational function and was explicit that practical education should be a part of apprenticeship training. Any of these methods of education would be preferable to sending children to state schools where they would only be as young serfs being prepared for future servitude. In principle, he said, the education of the individual should be the "concentration in the soul of a young man of the rays coming in from all points of the collectivity," but when the church and state intervene, education becomes only an instrument for continuing exploitation.²²

Proudhon devoted his longest and most carefully thought-out book De la justice dans la révolution et dans l'église, to the church. In De la justice he compared his own revolutionary system of justice to the "justice" imposed by the existing church. He believed most of the beliefs of the Christian religion were based on myths, and that religion per se was produced by mystical intuition and metaphysical speculation in direct contravention of man's ability to reason. The church as presently organized, he saw as an instrument for perpetuating hypocrisy and aristocracy among individuals. It was a totally unnecessary and corrupting institution.

In place of present political, economic, educational and religious systems, Proudhon proposed free association, limited only to maintaining

²²Proudhon, Contradictions économiques (2 tomes; Paris: Guillaumin et cie., 1846), I, p. 227; De la capacité politique des classes ouvrières in Oeuvres complètes, III (Rivière éd. Paris: Librairie des sciences politiques et sociales, 1924), pp. 316 ff.; De la justice in Oeuvres complètes, VIII (4 tomes; Rivière éd. Paris: Librairie des sciences politiques et sociales, 1935), II, p. 332.)

equality in the means of production and equivalence in exchange, as the highest perfection of society. In his "positive anarchy" liberty would be "not the daughter but the mother of order."²³

Proudhon thought this form of society could most effectively be brought into existence by offering a spontaneous independent social example within the existing state and without violating its law, thus applying even now the principles for the future constitution of society.²⁴ The mechanism by which these marvelous effects would be produced was the famous Banque du peuple to which the entire system of Proudhon is often reduced. Proudhon wanted to establish a bank in which working people could exchange their products among themselves by means of labor checks representing the hours of labor required to produce each commodity. The bank could lend money at a nominal rate of less than one per cent to cover administrative costs. Credit advances would provide the worker with the means of possessing his own instruments of production and thereby ensure him the full enjoyment of the products of his labor. The capitalistic system would gradually go out of existence as it was thus rendered unprofitable.²⁵ The initial association of Proudhonists would form the first unit of the envisioned society. As other people saw the results and voluntarily contracted together to form similar mutualist associations, they would link themselves to earlier units by contracts

²³Proudhon, Solution, p. 45.

²⁴Proudhon, Confessions, pp. 192-94.

²⁵A detailed plan for the Bank of the People is given in Solution of the Social Problem, pp. 60-169.

on the principle of federalism.²⁶

Working within the state did not mean compromise with the state to Proudhon. Despite his advocacy of peaceful means, he insisted on referring to the coming change in society as a revolution, and he was emphatic that it should be accomplished by the masses. He wrote in his notebook on October 5, 1846, that change must be "born of the people."²⁷ In a speech given at a Banquet of the Republic in Montmartre on October 15, 1848, he insisted, "The people alone can save civilization and make humanity advance."²⁸

He exhorted working people to unite themselves in free associations for the purpose of mutual aid, and he warned that they should not be deceived by promises of representation in government or the deceptive lure of universal suffrage. He rejected democracy as a fraud of magnificent proportions and urged the people to participate only in direct action outside existing governmental channels.²⁹

Proudhon believed that, as the worker undertook this action, he would gain a new awareness of himself, for "to possess political capacity is to have consciousness of oneself as a member of a collectivity."³⁰ The coming of the revolution would have the effect of a moral awakening in which not only the state and the economy, but the individual as well, would be purged.

²⁶Proudhon described his system of federalism in Du principe fédératif published in 1863.

²⁷Proudhon, Carnets, I, p. 348.

²⁸Quoted in Woodcock, Proudhon, p. 140.

²⁹Proudhon, Carnets, I, p. 348; Confessions, p. 229; De la capacité politique, pp. 216, 265, 80.

³⁰Ibid., p. 216.

The post revolutionary society was described in glowing terms:

What is mutuality (the contractual society) in effect? A formula of justice...by virtue of which the members of society regardless of their rank, fortune, or condition...promise each other and reciprocally guarantee each other service for service, credit for credit, pledge for pledge, surety for surety, value for value, information for information, good faith for good faith, truth for truth, liberty for liberty, property for property.³¹

The Question of Originality: Proudhon and Marx

Proudhon's thinking was to a great degree original in that it grew out of his own personal experiences and his outlook on society as a member of the working class. Yet he was himself cognizant that originality in a writer is often more apparent than real. He wrote to Tilloy in 1856:

I recognize that there are very few ideas concerning which a writer can say 'these are my very own.' All that really belongs to us is a certain way of stating them, un à-propos, and a relationship that we discover between these ideas and certain others.³²

He acknowledged as Masters, i.e., those who had caused fecund ideas to be born in him, the Bible, Adam Smith, and Hegel.³³ He had read theology and the economists as a youthful apprentice in printshops. His introduction to Hegel came later. Marx claimed that he injected Proudhon with Hegelianism which Proudhon could never understand fully because he could not read German.³⁴ E. H. Carr has contended that Bakunin introduced

³¹ Ibid., pp. 203-204.

³² Proudhon, Correspondance, VII, p. 135.

³³ J. A. Langlois, "Notice sur Proudhon" in Ibid., I, p. xxii.

³⁴ Marx to Schweitzer, 24 January 1865, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Correspondence 1846-1895, trans. by Dona Torr (New York: International Publishers, 1942), p. 171.

Proudhon to Hegel, with the result that the dialectic appeared in "a strangely distorted form" in Contradictions économiques in 1846.³⁵

Diaries and letters indicate that Proudhon did, indeed, discuss Hegel with Marx and Bakunin as with Karl Grun and other émigrés in Paris, but he did not meet any of them before 1844 and his correspondence reveals an acquaintance with Hegelianism at least as early as 1839.

Chapter V of Qu'est-ce que la Propriété, which appeared in 1840, indicates a clear understanding of the Hegelian formula.

What appeared in 1846 was not a distortion of Hegel, but Proudhon's own adaptation of the dialectic. He thought life much too complex to be expressed simply in terms of a thesis and antithesis. Instead he was convinced that a multitude of contradictory elements constitute society and that their continual antagonistic interplay results in a mediation, a dialectical solution, of their interests. These contradictory elements he referred to as antinomies and his method he called antinomique. His ideas of reciprocity among individuals and the perpetual balance of the economy are to be seen in the light of this unity of opposites in the dialectic. Proudhon exhibited in the development of this method and in his reliance on the categorical imperative as a basis for his Moral Philosophy an indebtedness to Kant as well as to Hegel. He acknowledged this indebtedness in a letter to Guillaumin in November of 1846: "In reading the antinomies of Kant, I have...seen...a veritable law of nature and of thought."³⁶

³⁵E. H. Carr, Michael Bakunin (London: Macmillan and Co., 1937), p. 131.

³⁶Quoted in Dolléans, Proudhon, p. 74.

He was not always so willing to admit influences on the substance of his philosophy. Of Fourier, with whom he had been intrigued as a young man, he wrote "I have certainly read Fourier, and I spoke of him more than one time in my writings, but over all, I don't believe I owe him anything."³⁷ Nevertheless, the influences are there in the insistence on the gregarious nature of man, in the belief that the social revolution would be accomplished within existing society by setting an example, and in the idyllic, childlike vision of the postrevolutionary world. Traces of Godwin and Owen can be seen in the emphasis on man's inherent reasonableness and propensity to cooperate. John Locke's idea that people have the right and the obligation to put an end to governments which no longer perform the functions for which they were instituted may also be noted.

G. D. H. Cole has asserted that the strongest influence on Proudhon came from Rousseau with whom he shared a distrust of intellectuals, an exaltation of les sentiments, a belief in man's corruptibility under civilization, and a faith in nature.³⁸ Proudhon frequently cited Rousseau, but, characteristically, he exhibited no consistent attitude toward him. At times he identified himself with Rousseau as a social critic; yet again and again he caustically denounced him both as a man and as a thinker. He said Rousseau's idea of a social contract pertained only to political relations and that Rousseau never really understood the "social" contract, the very idea of which precludes that of govern-

³⁷Langlois, "Notice sur Proudhon", in Proudhon, Correspondance, I, p. xxii.

³⁸G. D. H. Cole, A History of Socialist Thought, Vol. I: The Fore-runners, 1789-1850 (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1959), p. 216.

ment.³⁹ From his customary stance as a moralist, he pronounced that decadence in France had begun with Rousseau's romantic glorification of man in his natural state and the lauding of feelings and sentiments at the expense of reason.⁴⁰ Aaron Noland, who has done a fine study on the relationship between Proudhon and Rousseau, makes the incisive observation that Proudhon's rhetoric often tends to divert the attention of his reader from beliefs which Proudhon, in fact, shares with his antagonist of the moment.⁴¹

This characteristic was also typical of Karl Marx, as a brief look at his relationship with Proudhon will readily show. The two became acquainted in the fall of 1844 when Proudhon returned to Paris for a visit from Lyons. They developed a mutual respect for each other and enjoyed long conversations which sometimes lasted all night. Marx was hopeful that they might work together in socialist endeavors. In La Sainte Famille which appeared early in 1845, Marx praised Proudhon's discovery of basic contradictions in economics. He described Proudhon's work as "a serious Manifesto of the French Proletariat" and said "Proudhon does not only write in the interest of the proletarians, he is a proletarian himself."⁴² But their approaches to socialism, even at this early stage in their theoretical development, were radically different. Proudhon's socialistic ideas were built around the moral idea of the fulfillment of

³⁹Proudhon, L'idée générale, pp. 187-191.

⁴⁰Proudhon, De la justice in Oeuvres complètes (4 tomes; Riviere éd. (Paris: Librairie des sciences politiques et sociales, 1935), IV, pp. 216-219.

⁴¹Aaron Noland, "Proudhon and Rousseau," Journal of the History of Ideas, XXVIII (1967), 47.

⁴²Quoted in Dolléans, Proudhon, p. 95.

the individual as he realized himself within society. To Marx, the strength and importance of a single individual could be measured, not as an isolated entity within society, but only as he fitted into the society as a whole on the strength of the entire social structure.

Proudhon warned Marx of the dangers of intolerance of other opinions and urged that they keep their common goals ever in mind. He feared the tyranny that he felt would surely result from a movement that put too much emphasis on centralization.⁴³ Marx replied with an all-out attack.

La Misère de la philosophie, published the year after Système des contradictions économiques ou La Philosophie de la misère appeared, was intended to make a mockery of Proudhon's theories. In it, he called Proudhon a "petty-bourgeois" and "a clever pamphleteer" who trumpeted only his own glorification and wearisome nonsense with the voice of a blustering buffoon.⁴⁴ Proudhon published no reply; instead, he merely noted in the margin of his copy of Marx's book: "What Marx really means is that he regrets that my thinking agrees with his and that I have said it before him."⁴⁵

It is true that the two were in agreement on many points,⁴⁶ but their basic doctrinal and tactical differences would have made prolonged coopera-

⁴³Proudhon à Marx, 17 mai 1846, Correspondance, II, pp. 198-202.

⁴⁴Karl Marx, Misère de la philosophie in Oeuvres (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1965), I, pp. 9-136.

⁴⁵Proudhon's notes in the margin of his copy of La Misère de la philosophie have been reproduced by Roger Picard in an appendix to Contradictions économiques, Tome II, Rivière éd., pp. 415-423.

⁴⁶They agreed (a) that work was the essential human characteristic, (b) that labor was the true measure of value, (c) that property based upon exploitation of one man's labor by another is dehumanizing, (d) that this exploitation alienates a man from his true nature and from other men

tion impossible. It is not the purpose of this paper to examine the extent to which Marx and Proudhon influenced each other; that Marx should have had as much influence on Proudhon as Proudhon on Marx is, however, highly unlikely. At the time of their discussions in Paris, the Frenchman was ten years older and had already established his approach to working-class problems. Marx, on the other hand, was still unknown and, though well-educated, was still in the process of formulating his economic theories. This is not to propose that Proudhon was responsible for the theories for which Marx is famous. The paternity of ideas is well-nigh impossible to establish, especially as they circulate within a given climate of opinion. And even if, as J. Hampden Jackson and others have suggested, the genes of Marx's theory can be found in Proudhon and earlier writers, the order of their succession to the twentieth century must surely be credited to Marx.⁴⁷ Proudhon could not compete as the founder of a school.

The Appeal of Proudhonism to French Working People

Proudhon's appeal to the masses was not in the form of a tightly-woven system of thought; he was never single minded enough to formulate a theory that did not contain contradictions. His antinomical method was sufficiently dense to discourage many readers, and his style was rambling, vague,

to the extent that there can be no adequate financial commensuration for the loss, and (e) that the working classes must liberate themselves by an attack on the totality of society. Both saw the final solution of proletarian problems in a society of free associations of producers.

⁴⁷ Jackson, Marx, Proudhon, p. 67.

and all-embracing--full of characteristics of the autodidact. Curiously, these very qualities were what endeared him to his public. Proudhon was very French. Through his writings flashed a peculiarly Proudhonian fire that expressed itself in a few shattering slogans: "Property is theft!" "God is evil." "L'atelier fera disparaître le gouvernement." He was closer in temperament to the solid French peasant and worker than any of his contemporaries. Despite his emphasis on reason and his insistence on the importance of ideas, he had a passion for justice, a devotion to principle, a suspicion of bonds on the individual, and a contempt for intellectuals who did not have their roots in the common people--all of which were common attributes of the French working people.

Proudhon was aware that his writings were variously interpreted and often not as he had intended. He tried in Contradictions économiques to correct the persistent misunderstanding of his famous phrase "Property is theft!"⁴⁸ Perhaps the greatest irony relating to this man of paradoxes is that he should have appeared--as have many advocates of peaceful methods--to be a violent revolutionary. He had a sense of the violence inherent in human nature, even in himself, and he knew that the irrational is often more important than the rational as a factor in human actions. He tried to explain this in terms of certain egotistical, beclouding "absolutist elements" in human reason which drive man to try to "torture the facts" and change relationships so as to modify reality.⁴⁹ He saw human history as a struggle of the human will against these elements.

⁴⁸Proudhon, Contradictions économiques, Rivière éd., II, p. 182.

⁴⁹Proudhon, De la justice, Rivière éd., III, p. 173.

The violence in his own personality was manifested in vitriolic outbursts against the Jews, homosexuals, the Church, private property, and indeed anything which he strongly opposed. In some situations, he would call for the death penalty, even for the use of torture, and in a different frame of mind would question the right of society to punish at all.⁵⁰ His provincial, puritan inhibitions helped him to keep his own violent tendencies in check, but his words betrayed him. Revolution was at the heart of his thinking. His moralistic philosophy was formulated to serve the cause of revolution, and he judged men and events according to their ability to aid this cause.⁵¹ His motto for Contradictions économiques, "Destruam et aedificabo," contained both a positive and a negative appeal. He emphasized that, by the deed of destruction, he hoped to build. On the ruins of a detestable reign of authority, he foresaw a society of liberty and well-being: "Liberty on the political level to be achieved by Federalism, Well-Being on the economic level to be achieved by Mutualism."⁵² Understandably, the burdened and impoverished French proletariat found the negative message more telling than the positive.

Proudhon's private writings reflect his alarm at the notoriety he was acquiring. He noted in his diary in 1848 that he had become in Paris

⁵⁰ Proudhon, Carnets, II, pp. 26, 173.

⁵¹ Jacques Chabrier (L'idée de la révolution d'après Proudhon [Paris: Les éditions Domat-Montchrestien, R. Loviton et cie., 1935], p. 7), D. W. Brogan (Proudhon [London: Hamish Hamilton, 1934], p. 83), George Woodcock (Anarchism, p. 281), and James Joll (The Anarchists, pp. 68-69) all attest to the violence inherent in Proudhon's thinking.

⁵² Quoted in Jean Maitron, Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France, 1880-1914 (Paris: Société d'éditions et de librairie, 1951), p. 30.

"the terror man" and wrote to Dr. Muguet, a Comtois friend in August of that same year, "I am like a salamander. I live in the fire." ⁵³

In the later years of his life he felt it was necessary to explain his feelings on the use of violence. In La Guerre et la Paix, published in 1861, he attempted to explain, by means of his antinomical method, the causes of War. War results, he said, from the necessity of finding a compensation for the misery resulting from economic imbalance. The first half of his book amounted to a philosophical vindication of the use of force. As he wrote in a series of letters to a Citoyen Rolland in explication of La Guerre et la Paix, "The moral force that is forgotten, misunderstood, and denied, despite all the evidence, is the law of force from which the laws of war are deduced."⁵⁴ In the second half of the book, he went on to postulate that war was no longer a means of social ends, but was used by the majority as a means of exploitation and had become, like the Church, an anachronism. He believed that humanity no longer wanted war and saw the great mission of the nineteenth century to be the regulation of war and the promotion of peace. Lasting peace would not be achieved, however, until the present social system was changed and exploitation ended. When this book appeared, he was ironically hailed as a war-monger, especially by those who had not managed to get through more than the first part. This interpretation of Proudhon has not yet filtered down to the twentieth century. Especially in English-speaking countries where the impact of his thought is still

⁵³Quoted in Woodcock, Proudhon, p. 135; Proudhon, Correspondance, II, p. 344.

⁵⁴Quoted in Dolléans, Proudhon, p. 384.

little known (for not much of his work has been translated), he is generally thought of as the author of mutualism, the founder of the idea of the People's Bank. Though he is often called le père d'anarchisme, few relate him to the violence that is usually associated with the anarchist tradition.

He is, in fact, often referred to as a reactionary whose solution to society's ills was wholly agrarian. His love of the earth and sense of its importance in the moral and material life of the community were an integral part of his psychological composition.⁵⁵ His most severe critics have accused him of seeing even the workshop, l'atelier, which he designated as the basic element of the new society, in a rural setting. Marx would give him credit only for expressing one stage of socialist development. Perhaps it was, as George Woodcock has suggested, "an inevitable result of his background that Proudhon should look to a society in which every Claude-François would get his fair share of land and would never have to fear the threatening hand of the mortgage holder."⁵⁶

Those who would limit Proudhon's applicability to an agrarian economy of small farms and craft workshops are usually unaware of the development of his thought. Up to 1840 he had had little opportunity to observe industrially developing areas, and his vision of reorganized

⁵⁵ In one description of post-revolutionary society, he wrote: "Humanity...will concern itself with the tilling and caring for the soil which will provide it with a life of delights--as recommended by the philosopher Martin in Candide, man will cultivate his garden. Agriculture, once the lot of a slave will be one of the first of the fine arts, and human life will be passed in innocence, freed of all the seduction of the ideal." De la justice, 1er ed., II, p. 575.

⁵⁶ Woodcock, Proudhon, p. 51

society in Qu'est-ce la propriété? seemed to take into account only small farmers and individual craftsmen. His idea for the People's Bank which materialized in 1848 was an association for exchange of products between peasants and small workshop groups. Later he came to think in terms of closely knit workers' associations in certain trades.⁵⁷ In the sixth part of L'idée de la révolution, the third chapter is devoted to the division of labor, the collective force of workers, and the importance of machines. Proudhon grudgingly admitted that for the small segment of the population who are employed as salaried workers in this kind of industrial situation, workers' associations could serve as a revolutionary expedient. It must be made clear that Proudhon at no time advocated collective ownership; the workers' associations of which he spoke would exist only for the purpose of proletarian control of their own means of production.⁵⁸ One must not forget that this book was written in 1851 when the small workshop, employing fewer than ten people, was as it was for a long time afterwards, the typical industrial situation in France.

There is no doubt that Proudhon foresaw the tendencies toward monopoly and the growth of large-scale industrial capitalism.⁵⁹ In De la

⁵⁷He wrote in the 8-15 novembre 1848 issue of Le peuple, a revolutionary journal which he edited: "Ces associations ouvrières... soient des modèles proposées à l'agriculture, à l'industrie, et au commerce, le premier noyau de cette vaste fédération de compagnies et de sociétés réunies dans le lieu commun de la République démocratique et sociale." Quoted in Dolléans, Proudhon, p. 223.

⁵⁸Proudhon, L'idée générale, pp. 158-175.

⁵⁹Proudhon, "Carnets", 4 septembre 1852, 18 octobre 1852, quoted in Dolléans, Proudhon, p. 222.

justice, he attacked the idea that progress and well-being are necessary results of industrialization. That, he said, is a false calculation and a false conclusion: "There is displacement of trade, displacement of returns, displacement of wealth, all to the detriment of the multitude of small industries which make up the industrial democracy, and all to the gain of big industry which is forming this very hour a new feudalism."⁶⁰ It was to this kind of economic structure that he would have applied his views on "les compagnies ouvrières."

In De la capacité politique des classes ouvrières (1865), he again addressed himself to the problem of proletarian coalitions. He defined the working classes vis-à-vis the bourgeoisie, but it must be noted that his use of the term bourgeoisie was not restrictive; it included all of society except those actively engaged in manual labor. He again reluctantly admitted that workers' unions might serve some tactical purposes, but he steadfastly refused to sanction strikes as a method of direct action. It was, he said, a matter of submitting to the realities of power, and he still insisted that mutualism was the superior economic weapon.⁶¹

De la capacité politique was as à propos in a factory situation as among country people and artisans. The applicability of Proudhonist theories to a variety of conditions was not lost to subsequent leaders in the French working-class movement.

⁶⁰Proudhon, De la justice, 1er éd., III, p. 13.

⁶¹Proudhon, De la capacité politique, pp. 96-97, 377-378.

CHAPTER II

1848: PROUDHON TRANSLATES HIS IDEAS INTO ACTION

The year 1848 marked the beginning of Proudhon's influence on the French proletariat. During the revolutions of that year in Paris, he played the role of witness, participant, critic, historian, even prophet. It was the one period of his life when he was sufficiently overwhelmed by enthusiasm to do more for the cause of Revolution than just write. He came to Paris from Lyons late in 1847 to edit a journal to be called Le Peuple. To his friend Bergmann, he wrote that this would be his "first act of economic revolution...From criticism, I am passing to action; and this action makes its debut through a journal."¹

He did not actively agitate for a revolution, although he sensed that one was coming. In January of 1848, he wrote to a friend that the greatest happiness which could occur for the French people would be that the one hundred deputies of the opposition should be thrown into the Seine with millstones tied around their necks.² The situation was becoming intolerable, but Proudhon did not expect the revolt to come so soon. When it did come, in February, he worried and fretted that the action was premature.

Nevertheless, he was excited enough to join his friends in uprooting trees and carrying stones for a barricade. His rationalization was

¹Proudhon, Correspondance, II, p. 272.

²Ibid., p. 277.

that once he saw the affair was begun, he did not wish to abandon them and disavow their heroism. He even wrote the first republican manifesto.³ This psychological and political commitment to the cause of the revolution was in direct contradiction to his theories. When he had time to think, he wrote that he regretted the turn of events; he could see that the revolution would not succeed. Political liberty would be achieved only when economic inequality was made to disappear.⁴ He expressed his apprehension and anxieties over the new government in a letter to Louis Blanc.⁵

On May 15, the Assembly was invaded by a crowd, an action to which Proudhon was publicly opposed. He was, nonetheless, designated to the Hotel de Ville to take part in a new government. By this time his name was invoked whenever the working people sought to affirm their position.⁶ Although his name was well known as a radical, his ideas had not been widely circulated among the uneducated masses before 1848. His written works were too difficult to penetrate the workshops, but his active participation in the February Revolution had publicized his ideas. During the February crisis four armed workers entered his room one evening to encourage him to publish the volume on which he had been working for the past year. Proudhon took this as an indication that the working people desired him to be the spokesman for their revolution, to provide the idea

³Proudhon à Maurice, 25 février 1848, Ibid., p. 282. Also Proudhon à Huguenet, 15 mars 1848, Ibid., p.291.

⁴Proudhon à Maurice, 25 février 1848, Ibid., p. 280.

⁵Ibid., p. 305.

⁶Much of the material in this paragraph is a summary of information found in Edouard Dolléans et J.-L. Puech, Proudhon et la révolution de 1848 (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948), pp. 48-9.

which he insisted was lacking.⁷ The four armed men offered to provide the means for Proudhon to edit a journal, which would be known as Le Représentant du peuple. Between March and June he also published three pamphlets which circulated widely among the people. They were entitled Solution du problème sociale, Organization du crédit, and Résumé de la question sociale. These were the theoretical materials on which he had planned to base the book Solution du problème sociale on which he had been working. The circumstances of revolution made it more prudent for him to break up the ideas into essay form to be published separately in pamphlets and newspaper articles.

The Republicans were vexed by his opposition to the provisional government. He had criticized the national workshops because they were controlled by the central government rather than by the people. The complete recasting of society which he proposed reaffirmed his reputation as a revolutionary character; the bourgeois were simply frightened of him.⁸ He recorded his reactions in his journal: "I am the object of a singular curiosity; they are nearly surprised that I don't have horns or talons. The terror that I cause is really ridiculous."⁹

In the June uprising he walked again among the people, convinced that it was a spontaneous uprising for bread and against the national workshops. He wrote in a letter to his friend Muguet, "The ill will of the Assembly is the cause of the insurrection."¹⁰ He was saddened, and

⁷Proudhon, à Maurice, 26 février 1848, Correspondance, II, pp. 287-288.

⁸Dolléans et Puech, Proudhon et la révolution de 1848, pp. 48-9.

⁹Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁰Proudhon, Correspondance, II, p. 337.

shocked, and sickened at the severity with which the revolt of the June Days was put down.

Proudhon had permitted himself to be elected to the National Assembly earlier in June, for motives that are difficult to discern. George Woodcock believes that he hoped to win official support for his idea of a People's Bank; James Joll thinks he had hoped to use the position as a means of bringing economic reform; and J. Hampden Jackson speculates that, in light of his vast popularity as editor of Le Représentant du peuple it was simply impossible for him to refuse to be the representative of the people.¹¹ Whatever his reasons, he was clearly disappointed with the experience.

In a July assembly debate over a Proudhonian petition for economic reform, Thiers accused him of attempting to arouse the masses to insurrection. To defend himself against Thiers, he spoke in the National Assembly on July 31. He was at best a mediocre speaker and no match for Thiers. Proudhon tried to explain the socialist nature of the February Revolution. He warned that the liquidation of the old society, which had begun in February, would be completed; whether the completion would be stormy or amicable would depend on the passions and the good or bad faith of the parties involved.¹² The Deputies did not understand what he was saying and were fearful of what they did not understand. Proudhon was censured by the Assembly, and his journal suppressed.

But he was a hero among the people. Almost immediately he was pro-

¹¹Woodcock, Anarchism, p. 126; Joll, The Anarchists, p. 72; Jackson, Marx, Proudhon, p. 81

¹²Quoted in Woodcock, Proudhon, pp. 134-135.

vided the means to launch a new paper, Le Peuple, which reached a circulation of 70,000.¹³ In August, he wrote to his Comtois friend, Dr. Muguet, that he felt "abandoned, betrayed, proscribed, execrated by the Reaction and the enemies of the Republic, but the people, who regard me henceforward as their sole representative, are flocking to me en masse. They swear only by or against me."¹⁴ This statement was probably an exaggeration, but at least provides an indication as to his support among the masses. In an open letter to the editors of the Journal des débats who had also accused him of inciting insurrection, he specifically allied himself with those who had promulgated the revolution as opposed to those in government positions: "The French worker asks for work, you offer him alms, and he rebels, he shoots at you. I prefer the French worker, and I glory in belonging to that proud race."¹⁵

Proudhon recognized, ahead of most of his contemporaries and while still in the midst of the tension of the crisis, that a new element had entered revolutionary history. From now on, the working people of France would be a force to be reckoned with. His speech before the Montmartre Banquet of the People in October was a veritable Toast to the Revolution:

Revolution of 1848, what are you called?--I shall name you the Right to Work.--What is your flag?--The Association!--Your Motto?--Equality before wealth!--Where are you leading us?--To fraternity!--I salute you, Revolution! I shall serve you as I have served God, as I have served philosophy and liberty, with all my heart, with all my soul, with

¹³ Jackson, Marx, Proudhon, pp. 85-86.

¹⁴ Proudhon, Correspondance, II, p. 344.

¹⁵ Quoted in Woodcock, Proudhon, p. 132.

all my intelligence and with all my courage, and I shall never again serve any sovereign or obey any rule other than you!¹⁶

Small wonder that he should have been considered a radical figure!

Proudhon's last act in the name of the 1848 Revolution came in January, 1849. Thinking the time had come to put his ideas on gratuitous credit into practice, he deposited the constituting statutes of Le Banque du Peuple with a notary. By March he had enlisted a membership of 27,000 and the Bank was beginning to function.¹⁷ But on March 28, Proudhon was convicted on a charge of subversive activities as a result of his attacks on Louis Bonaparte in Le Peuple. The Bank did not long survive without his leadership.

Charles Beslay, a long time friend of Proudhon and a Communard leader in 1871, summarized Proudhon's impact on the 1848 revolutions in his memoirs in 1873:

Without the intervention, influence and pen of Proudhon, the Revolution of 1848 would not have made its real imprint in history. It was he who forced the Republican formalists in the National Assembly to occupy themselves with economic discussions; it was he who, with an indomitable vigor, took the cause of work and of the proletariat into his own hands; it was he who forced the reaction to reckon with the vanquished democracy.¹⁸

Although coming from an avowed Proudhonist only twenty-five years removed from the Revolution, Beslay's is not a wholly unwarranted appraisal.

Deprived of leaders and intimidated by the repression that followed the Revolution of 1848 and the opposition to Louis Napoleon's coup-d'état in December, 1851, the French working classes were forced to remain politically dormant for some years. During these days of depression,

¹⁶ Quoted in Dolléans et Puech, Proudhon et la révolution de 1848, p. 62.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 70-71.

¹⁸ Charles Beslay, Mes-Souvenirs, quoted in Ibid., p. 75.

the greatest single influence among French, especially Parisian, workers was the mutualism of Proudhon. No powerful workers' union, no political organization, no concerted and sustained organized action--in short, no proletarian movement was possible. The workers' organizations were actually only elementary craft societies which, by this time, had accepted (perhaps out of the necessity of accepting the reality of the Second Empire) the Proudhonist teaching that the deliverance of the proletariat could not be accomplished by a political revolution. They thought that liberation by voluntary mutualist associations was their only hope in the face of the hostile force of the state. They were strongly opposed to centralization and looked forward to a day when their locally autonomous communes would be freely federated across France. In the sense that they rejected any form of government as unnecessary, they could be considered anarchists.

In the early 1860's a relaxation of restrictions resulted in increasing activity among French workers. Proudhon's mutualist and federalist ideas were so widely disseminated among them that French historians generally agree that he was the most influential social theoretician of the times. Producers' co-operatives and paralleling credit societies utilizing Proudhon's mutualist formulae sprung up. Eugene Varlin, a young bookbinder who was to become a leader of the French section of the International and later of the 1871 Commune, established a cooperative kitchen in Paris to provide meals for the working people.¹⁹ By 1866, there were twelve workers' mutual credit societies, seven co-operatives

¹⁹ Joll, The Anarchists, pp. 81-82.

in Paris and more than fifty in the provinces.²⁰ There was never a Proudhonian party--Proudhon specifically discouraged that²¹--but by the mid-1860's Proudhonists dominated French working-class activities.²²

Oddly, during the years after 1848, Proudhonism became a thing apart from Proudhon. He spent these years quietly, away from the public eye, in prison or exile for much of the time. Consequently and typically for a man of paradox, his personal popularity diminished as the influence of his theories was extended. With the publication of La Guerre et la Paix in 1861, he became once again the center of controversy as a revolutionary figure, and in 1862 he returned to Paris where the beginnings of a personal following took shape. A tangible evidence of his influence was seen in the 1863 elections when thousands of Frenchmen followed his advice to abstain from voting on the grounds that universal suffrage was a fraud perpetrated on the electorate. There is, of course, no way of determining what proportion of the 85,000 non-voters actually abstained out of sympathy with Proudhon's theory and how many were simply apathetic. At any rate, Proudhon hailed the 1863 elections as a great moral victory. He recognized the limitations of the situation but gloried in what he had accomplished.²³

²⁰Frank Jellinek, The Paris Commune of 1871, Universal Library (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1965), p. 36.

²¹Proudhon à Alfred Darimon, 14 octobre 1860, Correspondance, X, pp. 176-178.

²²This summary of French working-class activities in the 1850's and 60's was gleaned from a number of sources. Especially valuable were G. D. H. Cole, A History of Socialist Thought, Vol. II, Marxism and Anarchism, 1850-1890, (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1957); G. M. Stekloff, History of the First International (New York: Russell and Russell, 1968)--for a Marxist viewpoint; Edouard Dolléans, Histoire du mouvement ouvrier (3 tomes; Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1939), I; and Woodcock, Anarchism.

²³Proudhon à Gustave Chaudey, 10 mai 1863, Correspondance, XIII, pp. 47-49; Proudhon à Bastide, 14 mai 1863, Ibid., pp. 53-57.

In 1864 a group of Parisian workingmen, led by Proudhonists Tolain and Limousin, published a document known as Le Manifeste des soixante in which they argued that members of the working classes should stand for election to represent their own interests since the bourgeoisie could no longer be trusted to represent them. Le Manifeste des soixante did not amount to a sell-out of Proudhonist doctrine. Its signers simply saw the value in utilizing government positions as a platform for their free-credit doctrines until such time as they could accomplish their final liberation.²⁴ Proudhon could not agree with this viewpoint, of course, and spent the last year of his life developing his rebuttal. De la capacité politique des classes ouvrières was published posthumously in 1865. Its influence on the French working-classes was greater than any of his other books, especially inasmuch as he emphasized the role of the individual worker in his own liberation.

In the meantime, the First International Working men's Association had been formed in London at the instigation of a group of French Proudhonist workers who had gone there to observe English working conditions.²⁵ The enthusiasm which this organization engendered served as a two-way stimulus. The Proudhonian tendencies of the French working people provided fuel for the fires of the International while at the same time the activities for the International provided an incentive for French workers

²⁴ "Manifeste des soixante ouvriers de la Seine," reprinted as an appendix to Proudhon, De la capacité politique, pp. 409-416.

²⁵ Minutes of Meeting in Saint Martin's Hall, London, September 28, 1964, in L. E. Mins, ed., Founding of the First International: A Documentary Record (New York: International Publishers, 1937), p. 11. Benoit Malon in his "Carnet" quoted in Le Livre noir de la Commune de Paris, Dossier complet (2e éd. Bruxelles: Office de publicité de l'International, 1871), p. 36, also asserts that it was the French workmen in London in 1864 who developed the idea of a Workers' International.

to involve themselves in their own behalf. Proudhonism was thus the distinguishing factor in the shaping of French working-class activities into a labor movement.

CHAPTER III

PROUDHONISM IN THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL: MARX'S STRUGGLE TO CONTROL THE ORGANIZATION

In 1848 Proudhon had made his debut into the French proletarian consciousness. By the mid-1860's Proudhonism had become a significant force within an international workers' movement. The entire history of the First International Workingmen's Association is the continuing story of Karl Marx's frustrated efforts to gain its complete control in the face of a Proudhonian-inspired opposition.

Despite Marx's attempt to give Mazzini credit for the idea,¹ the formation of an international workingmen's organization was not the creation of any one individual imagination. It was born at a moment of the proletarian conscience when workingmen realized that the improvement of their condition would depend upon them alone. Perceiving the few benefits that they had been able to derive from overt revolutionary efforts or from dependence upon the bourgeois to improve their condition, they came to understand that their efforts would profit from cooperation only with other working people. This was the frame of mind to which Proudhon had hoped to bring them. He had not attempted, as had Marx, to bring the proletariat to a narrow realization of class consciousness in which they saw themselves locked in a struggle with their dialectical opposite, the bourgeoisie. Instead, he had wanted working people to see themselves as opposing all of society, unable to rely on any but their

¹Karl Marx, "L'internationale dévoilée" in Le Livre noir, p. 31.

own kind for aid in their liberation.

Among the several forerunners to the International, at least two showed definite signs of Proudhonist inspiration. The French Workers' Federation of 1849-50 was a fraternal union of 104 member associations. Its objectives were to plan operations of general interest, establish gratuitous credit for all members, organize an exchange between member associations, and recognize the solidarity of workers.² In April 1856, a delegation of French workers arrived in London with the announced intention of organizing a League of Workers. The objective of this group was to be the social emancipation of the working class, which could only be achieved by a union of workers of all lands, to be accomplished through the establishment of productive and distributive co-operatives. The organization never materialized, but its proposal had a stimulating effect on the International Committee which had been formed in London in 1855.³

It would be inaccurate to say that all French workers in 1864 were Proudhonists or, for that matter, that all French members of the International were Proudhonists, but it is possible to affirm that Proudhonists played the most significant role in the debut of the International. Tolain made the principal address at the historic meeting in St. Martin's Hall. The text of the speech has not been preserved, but it was likely another of Tolain's orchestrations on his favorite theme: "There is only one way,

²Jules-L. Puech, Le Proudhonisme dans l'association internationale des travailleurs (Paris: Librairies Félix Alcan et Guillaumin réunies, 1907), p. 52.

³Stekloff, First International, p. 29.

that is to tell ourselves: you are free, organize yourselves, handle your own affairs, don't admit to any obstacles."⁴ The records of the meeting indicate that after Tolain's speech, the French workmen presented a programme for an international organization of workingmen.

The Proudhonian spirit of the French programme appears in the preamble to the Provisional Statutes that were adopted by the fledgling organization:

That the emancipation of the working people must be accomplished by the workers themselves; that the efforts of the workers to bring about their emancipation should not tend to constitute new privileges, but to establish for all the same rights and the same duties.

That the economical subjection of the man of labor, that is the source of life, lies at the bottom of servitude in all its forms, of all social misery, mental degradation and political dependence.

That the economical emancipation of the working classes is therefore the great end to which every political movement ought to be subordinate as a means.

That the emancipation of labor is neither a local nor a national, but a social problem.

...

They (the undersigned members) declare that this International Association and all societies and individuals adhering to it will acknowledge truth, justice and morality as bases of their conduct towards each other and towards all men, without regard to color, creed or nationality.⁵

These Provisional Statutes, which were eventually adopted as Permanent Statutes, were drawn up by Karl Marx who saw how vastly useful the International organization could be to the socialist cause. Marx also saw that in order for the International to be useful, its programs would have to be acceptable to the French section whose representation constituted approximately one third of the International's voting members.⁶ Significantly,

⁴Arvon, L'anarchisme, p. 98.

⁵Mins, ed., First International, pp. 39-40.

⁶Minutes of the General Council of the First International (5 vols.; Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1964), II, p. 334.

the statutes and resolutions of the International, most of which were formulated by Marx, could be interpreted by various schools of socialist thought in terms of their own proposals for solving the social problem. Marx's diplomatic maneuvering of terminology also points up the many points of similarity between Marxism and Proudhonian anarchism at this stage of their development.

The strain between Marx and the Proudhonists began to appear as early as 1865. The International's General Council met privately in London to draw up the agenda for the first full-fledged Congress which was to be held in Geneva the following year. It was already obvious that the General Council would be the means by which Marx sought to control the organization. Marx simply drew up a set of "Instructions for Delegates" which the Council approved. At Geneva the Proudhonists, who were not to be outdone, counterposed a comprehensive programme in a special "Memoire from the French delegates."

Proudhonism was the essence of the International's doctrinal struggles at Geneva for much of the inspiration for the French Memoire had come from Proudhon's De la Capacité politique des classes ouvrières. The writers of the Memoire did not "wrap themselves in a Proudhonian flag,"⁷ but this, too, was as Proudhon had recommended: "The working classes are given to no master...they must follow their own inspiration and their own initiative. That is the gauge of their success."⁸

A survey of some of the Memoire's more prominent points will, however,

⁷Puech, Proudhonisme, p. 155

⁸Proudhon, De la Capacité politique, p. 74.

clearly reveal the Proudhonist influence. The French delegates were opposed to a resolution from the International in favor of shorter working hours on the grounds that the employer-employee relationship was, or should be, a private contractual affair and no outside party should intervene. They were opposed to political action on the part of workers, especially to efforts to secure reforms through legal enactments. They were opposed to the rise of strikes as a weapon, and recommended instead that workers should concentrate on developing cooperative associations. They felt that the entire trade union program of the International was unsatisfactory. They proposed an amendment to specify that while the worker had been a slave to the power of the guilds in the past and was oppressed by legal obligations in the present, he would be producer, capitalist and consumer in the future society. The French delegates proposed excluding from membership in the International all who were not directly engaged in manual labor. This would have excluded Marx, but was not directed specifically at him. This proposal was based on a deeply rooted distrust of bourgeois intellectuals among the French working classes, a distrust which Proudhon had shared and had encouraged in De la capacité by delineating clearly the class lines of the proletariat and insisting that working people alone could improve their lot. The French also proposed that the Congress consider the idea of an International Credit Bank based on the Proudhonian principle of gratuitous credit. They were opposed to public education, believing that the relegation of this responsibility to the state would be disastrous. Proudhon had taken the same position. Finally, they opposed a resolution supporting an independent Poland and another indicting Tsarism. Their reasoning was that the International should not involve itself in the

complicated question of nationalities when workers' problems were so pressing and should confine itself to a general statement condemning despotism. Proudhon had also opposed Polish independence as he opposed all nationalist endeavors, believing that a return to control by feudal aristocrats would be no improvement over a dismembered state.⁹

In the end, the Proudhonists were successful in defeating only three of Marx's nine points in his "Instructions for Delegates", but they did gain several concessions to Proudhonian ideas. The International did recognize the cooperative movement as a force in transforming society. Resolutions were passed favoring the establishment of producers' associations and a free credit bank based on the principle of Mutualism. The role of the trade unions was acknowledged to be two-fold: a. as agencies of struggle for the liberation of labor, b. as units of organization to supersede the wage labor system.¹⁰ Marx's victory at Geneva was less than complete; the Proudhonists had proved themselves to be a force that could not be lightly dismissed.

Marx wrote several letters during 1866 which revealed his concern and irritation with the difficulties the French delegates had provided for him. In June he wrote to Engels that a "grotesque" clique of Proud-

⁹Unfortunately, no text of the French Memoire is known to be available in this country. I am relying here on Puech and on other secondary sources which have quotes from this document. Julius Braunthal, History of the International, trans. by Henry Collins and Kenneth Mitchell (2 vols.; New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), I, pp. 121-127; Puech, Proudhonisme, pp. 157-59, 162-66; Minutes of General Council, II, pp. 334, 337. The references to Proudhon's views can be found in Contradictions Économiques, 1er éd., I, p. 227; De la capacité, pp. 362, 70; and La Guerre et la paix, pp. 170-172.

¹⁰The International Workingmen's Association, "Resolutions of the Congress of Geneva, 1866" (London: Westminster Printing Company, 1869), pp. 5, 7.

honist students in Paris were preaching peace, declaring war obsolete and Nationalities an absurdity.¹¹ Three weeks later he described the June 19 General Council discussion to Engels:

The representatives of Young France came out with an announcement that nationalities and nations are antiquated prejudices...Everything is to be dissolved into small 'groups' or 'communes' which in turn are to form an 'association' but no state. This 'individualization' of humanity and the corresponding 'mutuality' are to go on...until the French are ripe for Social revolution. Then they will demonstrate their experiment to us, and the rest of the world, overwhelmed by the force of their example, will follow suit.

This he pronounced was "Proudhonized Stirnerism."¹²

After the Geneva Congress was over, Marx wrote to Kugelmann that things had really not gone so badly at Geneva as they might have, for:

The Parisians had their heads full of Proudhon's most empty phrases...Proudhon has created an enormous mischief: his pretense at criticism and his semblance of opposition to the utopians (he is himself only a utopian petit-bourgeois)...have first seduced and corrupted the brilliant youth, the students, then the workers, especially the Parisians...¹³

The resolutions of the Lausanne Congress in 1867 indicated that the Frenchman's followers were still a force to be reckoned with a year later. The ultimate goal of the International, once the emancipation of workers from the power and influence of capital was achieved, was to be the formation of a confederation of free states in all Europe. The primary cause of war was specified to be poverty resulting from a lack of economic

¹¹ Minutes of the General Council, I, p. 417.

¹² Ibid., pp. 417-418.

¹³ Albert Fried and Ronald Sanders, eds., Socialist Thought, a Documentary History, Anchor Books (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964), pp. 305-306.

equilibrium. In order to suppress war, nothing less radical would suffice than a complete reorganization of the social system based on a just distribution of property.¹⁴ All three of these resolutions were grounded in Proudhonian principles. That these, and a few other resolutions expressed in Proudhonist phraseology, could also be interpreted in Marxist terms is an indication of the direction in which the International was moving. Marx was still far from complete control and continued to try to placate the Proudhonists with concessions that were more apparent than real.

With the Brussels Congress of 1868, the struggle within the International shifted its emphasis and assumed different proportions. As at earlier congresses, several resolutions of compromise with Proudhonian principles were agreed upon. The Geneva Congress had approved the idea of public education over the protest of Proudhonists; now at Brussels the International was willing to recognize that education by the state might not adequately meet the educational needs of working people. A resolution was passed encouraging the different sections to establish courses of public lectures on scientific and economic subjects in an effort to help remedy the shortcomings of workingmen's education. The Brussels Congress also maintained the earlier theoretical affirmation of a Mutual Credit Bank but shelved the possibility of establishing one by asking the Belgians to produce a detailed plan and report. Workers were urged to utilize their cooperative associations and organizations of mutual credit to obtain possession of the machinery which was the

¹⁴ Resolutions of the Lausanne Congress quoted in Marx, "L'Internationale dévoilée," Le Livre noir, pp. 34-35.

instrument of their exploitations. Collective ownership was a Marxist idea, but the workers' use of these organizations at least to gain control of the equipment with which they worked was clearly within the Proudhonist spirit. Another method which Proudhon himself did not consider practicable, but which some Proudhonists had come to accept was the use of strikes as a weapon. The Brussels Congress agreed that strikes could not be the means to complete proletarian emancipation, but admitted they were a frequent necessity in the actualities of day-to-day struggles. Specifically, the Congress urged members of the International to "cease work" in the event of war, a recommendation based on the socialist belief, which Proudhon had enunciated, that war was an outgrowth of the existing economic and political systems.¹⁵

In the most significant resolution passed, the International accepted the principle of socialization of property. It was agreed that lands, mines, railroads, and the other great productive forces could best be worked by machinery and collective labor power. These means of production would be let by contract to companies of workingmen who would establish a price for their labor as nearly as possible approximate to the working expenses. A second contract would guarantee the mutual rights of each member in respect to his fellow workmen.¹⁶ A new element had asserted itself in the International — one which admitted collectivization but which remained resolutely attached to Proudhonist principle. This was socialization of property but not state control.

¹⁵The International Workingmen's Association, "Resolutions of the Brussels Congress, 1868," pp. 10-12, 14.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 12-13.

It was not only a case of bending in order to survive, but as well the admission of a new dimension to an elastic philosophy. Proudhon himself had suggested in the sixth study of L'idée générale de la révolution that large scale industries and large establishments, such as railroads, could best be operated by associations of workers. With increasing industrialization, many of Proudhon's objections to collectivism had been watered down or forgotten by some of his French followers. To urban workers a generation removed from the farm, their fathers' passion to own their own small square of land was less important. One evidence of this trend could be seen in the struggle for leadership of the French section. Tolain's position was challenged by Eugene Varlin, who was still a federalist but who had become a collectivist.¹⁷

In the International, a new kind of struggle took shape. As the trend toward collectivism was accentuated, Marx's hope of building the organization into a highly centralized arm of international socialism met head-on with the powerful personality of Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin, a Russian aristocrat turned anarchist. Bakunin joined the International in 1868, and in 1869 attended the Basle Congress as a delegate representing both Lyons and Naples. His influence on the French working class movement was felt directly through his own participation in revolutionary actions at Lyons and indirectly through his writings and his activities in various international alliances, including the International. His unique contribution to the anarchist-socialist movement was felt in the impact of his revolutionary personality.

¹⁷Braunthal, History of the International, I, p. 140. This is not to say that old-style Proudhonism was completely dead; it was merely defeated as the leadership passed into younger, collectivist hands.

Bakunin willingly acknowledged his theoretical debt to Proudhon to whom he referred as "the great and true master of us all."¹⁸ He developed his own particular brand of Proudhonism which was based on an acceptance of Proudhon's moral philosophy and his anarchistic view of the future society with an added dimension. Bakunin believed that collective ownership of the means of production was both desirable and necessary in order to administer an industrial economic system effectively.

Little by little Bakunin's collectivism began to prevail over Proudhon's mutualist principles. After receiving a French protest that the collectivization resolutions passed at Brussels had not been adequately debated, the Basle Congress of 1869 agreed to reopen the matter for discussion. The resulting decision to uphold the Brussels resolutions is all the more significant in light of the fact that this was the most representative congress ever held by the International.¹⁹ Marx's struggles with mutualism were at an end, but Proudhonist influence was still felt in the International through Bakunin and his followers.

The new conflict in the International, fought between the Marxist forces of centralization and the proponents of federalism, was more a matter of political tactics than of theoretical differences. It was also, in large part, a personality clash between Marx and Bakunin. The rivalry raged outside the halls of the International for two years after Basle. In 1871 the General Council held a special session in London and

¹⁸Quoted in R. W. Postgate, The Workers' International (London: The Swarthmore Press Ltd., 1920), p. 47.

¹⁹Braunthal, History of the International, I, p. 136. Additional information on the proceedings of the Basle Congress can be found in Association internationale des travailleurs, Compte-rendu du quatrieme congrès international tenu à Bâle en septembre 1869 (Bruxelles: Imprimerie de Désiré Brismée, 1869).

passed pointedly anti-Bakuninist resolutions.²⁰ Feeling that retaliation was obligatory, Bakunin's followers held a conference at Sonvillier in the Jura Mountains of Switzerland. The Sonvillier Circular which came out of this conference reasserted the Proudhonian belief that centralization leads to tyranny and demanded that in order for the International to project the image of its principles of liberty and federation, it must be reconstituted as a "free federation of autonomous groups."²¹ The upshot of the matter was the expulsion of Bakunin from the International by the Hague Congress in 1872, and the transfer of the General Council to New York where it passed gradually out of existence. Proudhonist principles had lost out to Marxism in the First International, but their impact had been so great that Marx was willing to see the International die rather than continue the struggle.

²⁰Minutes of the General Council, IV, p. 173.

²¹Quoted in Joll, The Anarchists, p. 105; also in Woodcock, Anarchism, pp. 179, 246.

CHAPTER IV

THE PARIS COMMUNE OF 1871: PROUDHONIAN

FEDERALISM IS PUT INTO PRACTICE

There can be little question of the influence of Proudhonism on the theoretical foundations for the Paris Commune. Once the commune was an established fact, Marx obliquely tried to claim that its inspiration had come from him through the channels of the International. Many of the leaders of the French section of the International were instrumental in the formation of the Commune, but very few, if any, of these were Marxists. Most were collectivists of the Bakuninist variety, and nearly all had at one time or another embraced Proudhonism. In addition, the records and documents of the Commune clearly indicate that Proudhonian ideas had been widely assimilated into the thinking of Parisian working people.

The extent to which the International Workingmen's Association influenced the Paris Commune of 1871 has been the subject of wide speculation. Hans Gerth, who edited and translated the minutes of the Hague Congress, believes that the International had no particular influence on the course of events in France and things would probably have taken the same course had the organization not even existed. Marx, he says, merely "succeeded in snatching out of the reign of white terror a great political legend, especially important for modern Russian history."¹ The International

¹Hans Gerth, ed. and trans., The First International (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1958), p. xii. Support for Professor Gerth's accusation of Marx is to be found in the fact that, in his speech before the Inter-

certainly tried to claim credit for the Commune's inspiration. Marx in addressing an 1871 meeting of the General Council referred to the Commune as "the glorious harbinger of a new society." He did not openly avow any action on the part of the International in regard to the Commune, for police repression of the organization had already begun. He simply acknowledged many of the Commune's leaders were Internationalists and said that since members of the International were the most advanced workingmen in their respective countries, it was only natural that they should be in the foreground of any manifestation of the class struggle.²

In an essay written for a book of documents relating to the Commune, however, Marx made his claim explicit. Along with a long list of other evidence, he cited the overtly revolutionary resolutions of the Lausanne Congress of 1867 relating to war and the role of the proletariat, claiming that these doctrines had inspired the conduct of the Paris bureau.³ Ironically, this same book of documents can be used to show that Marx was merely exploiting an opportunity. In a letter written on February 28, 1871, Marx had called the uprising "a spontaneous but sterile apparition."⁴

The position taken by Val R. Lorwin, Frank Jellinek, and G. D. H. Cole

national's General Council, Marx presented the Commune as the classic example of a proletarian revolution. Ten years later he acknowledged in a letter to F. Domela-Nieuwenhuis that the Commune was "in no wise socialist", and "with a modicum of common sense" could have reached a compromise with Versailles. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy, edited by Lewis S. Feuer, Anchor Books (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1959), pp. 390-91.

² Marx, "The Civil War in France" printed in Minutes of the General Council, IV, p. 411.

³ Marx, "L'internationale dévoilée" in Le Livre noir, pp. 34-36.

⁴ Marx à Serrailleur, 28 février 1871, Ibid., p. 88.

is more acceptable than either of these extremes. They agree that although some of the leaders of the Paris Council of the International were among the leaders of the Commune, what happened in Paris in 1871 was not inspired, instigated or dictated by the International. Nor was it specifically socialist or, for that matter, even overwhelmingly proletarian. It was revolutionary and spontaneous, but it was not a planned insurrection. Arising out of a tradition of discussion and revolt, the Commune was primarily a matter of expediency in light of the circumstances. It represented the working classes mainly because most members of the upper classes had fled the city. Whatever ideological basis the Commune may have had was derived from the federalism of Proudhon.⁵

Nevertheless, it is possible, even probable, that the new militant temper of the International in the late 1860's did have an influence in the shaping of working class attitudes in Paris. Certainly, the Proudhonists who directed the French section were the most important labor leaders of the period. The Paris office of the International, which had been opened in 1865, served as a center through which working class propaganda was distributed. The secretary for the French section reported to the General Council in 1866 that reports of International proceedings were inserted in all the Republican and liberal newspapers of Paris.⁶ The Proudhonist Vermorel took over as editor of the Left Republican journal, Le Courrier Français in 1866. From then until the time of its demise in 1868, the paper served as the official organ of the International

⁵Val R. Lorwin, The French Labor Movement (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 13; Jellinek, Paris Commune, pp. 11-13; G. D. H. Cole, Marxism and Anarchism, p. 148.

⁶Minutes of the General Council, I, p. 138.

in France. Tolain regularly served as a columnist, and Vermorel published accounts of working class activities as well as documents, such as the Memoire of the French Delegates to the Geneva Congress.⁷ In 1869 a Proudhonist weekly La Voix du Peuple came out in Paris. Among its regular contributions were members of the International.⁸

The activities of the Internationalists seemed sufficiently threatening to the French government that in March, 1868 the members of the Paris Committee were tried in court for forming a society without the sanction of government authorities. While the charges were being investigated, the defendants declared the committee dissolved and called for new elections. By May the members of the second committee were also brought to trial. All of the accused used their speeches in court as a means of expounding on their Internationalist ideas.⁹ At least one of these committee members, Benoit Malon, indicated in his personal notebook that he was aware of a progressively more militant plan of action for workers' liberation in which international solidarity of working people was an acknowledged factor. Interestingly, Malon conceived the basis for the work of labor liberation to be the idea of justice.¹⁰

Although supposedly extinct after May, the continued existence of a clandestine Parisian bureau of the International was affirmed by corres-

⁷Jellinek, Paris Commune, p. 38

⁸Minutes of the General Council, III, p. 440.

⁹An account of this harassment of the Paris Committee can be found in Ibid., p. 440.

¹⁰Benoit Malon, "Carnet" quoted in Le Livre noir, p. 36.

pondence with the General Council.¹¹ The November 8, 1868 issue of La voix de l'avenir, a Proudhonist weekly published in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, carried a reproduction of a speech given in October by P. Visinier in his official capacity as secretary of the French section of the International.¹² Visinier reminded the association that truth, justice, and morality had been proclaimed as the basis for its international organization with the achievement of human rights and the emancipation of the working classes as its ends. The democratic, social, and universal nature of the organization should, he warned, prevent its members from consorting with royalists and monarchists.¹³

Internationalist leadership in Paris had, by this time, passed from the older, more doctrinaire Tolain, Fribourg and Limousin, who had set up the Paris bureau, into the hands of a younger and more militant group. For the most part these young leaders embraced a form of anarchistic federalism founded in a strong hostility to centralization and a desire for no more restraint than that exercised by the people in a locally autonomous commune.¹⁴ They could by no means all be called Proudhonists, although Vesinier and Vermorel still clung to that label. Varlin and Camelinat were syndicalist in outlook, and Malon was a collectivist who

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 46-76.

¹² It was not an uncommon practice during this period for French members of the International to be affiliated through branches outside of France. Ibid., p. 38. The newspaper, La Voix de l'avenir, is identified in Minutes of the General Council, II, p. 336.

¹³ Le Livre noir, pp. 40-43.

¹⁴ The determination of the ideological positions held by the young Internationalist leaders was drawn from the various volumes of G. D. H. Cole, History of Socialist Thought. Cole cites no primary sources, but other scholars support his opinions on these points.

was a friend of Bakunin. One common characteristic is significant! They had all matured intellectually concurrent with the development of the French working class movement of the 1860's, and Proudhon's influence had been predominant in both developing processes.

Malon and Varlin reestablished the Paris branch of the International, and by 1870 it had a membership of 70,000.¹⁵ If the views of the leaders can be read as an accurate indication of the general climate of working class opinions in Paris in 1871, then the spontaneous formulation of the Commune--once the administrative machinery of the city was withdrawn--should come as no surprise to anyone.

Given that the Proudhonist influence was shaping the psychological makeup of the Parisian workers; given that many of the same young men who held positions of importance in the French Internationalist organization came to be leaders of the Commune as well; and given that two prominent Proudhonists, Charles Beslay and Gustave Courbet, were placed in Communal positions of honor--one should expect to find Proudhonist thinking in the official documents of the Commune.

During the Prussian seize of 1870, Parisians, whose greatest complaint under the Second Empire had been the lack of municipal autonomy, spontaneously organized themselves into committees to provide for their own local needs, indicating their lack of trust in the provisional government to provide for them. In March of 1871, a central administrative committee was formed, and after having held elections, the central committee on March 29 returned its powers to the people of Paris and proclaimed the Commune in the Journal Officiel.

¹⁵ Jellinek, Paris Commune, p. 39.

Citizens: Your Commune is proclaimed. The vote of March 26 has sanctioned the victorious revolution. You are masters of your destinies. Strengthened by your support, the representation which you have established will repair the disasters caused by the disqualified powers.

France, after twenty years of feebleness, needs to regenerate itself from tyrannies and past indolence by calm liberty and assiduous work. Your elected representatives will guarantee your liberty. The work depends on you. Redemptions are personal. Group yourselves with confidence around your commune as it makes indispensable reforms. Let yourselves be guided by brotherhood among yourselves.¹⁶

At the first official session, Charles Beslay was elected honorary Doyen de la Commune, probably out of respect for his age. In his inaugural address, he described the future of the Commune in idealistic terms. He foresaw a federation of fully independent social groups as the Paris Commune provided the model for other liberations to come. While the Republic of '93 was a soldier who had to centralize in order to fight for its defense, the Republic of '71 would be a worker "who above all needs liberty in order to fertilize peace." "Peace and work! there lies our future!," he predicted. "There lies the assurance of our vindication and our social regeneration."¹⁷

These same Proudhonian ideas relating the importance of work to the coming "reign of justice" appear again and again in the Journal Officiel.¹⁸ The commune declared freedom of conscience and on April 1, invited all

¹⁶ "Journal officiel de la Commune," 29 mars 1871, Revue de France, Supplement, 1871, IX, X.

¹⁷ "Les 31 séances officielles de la commune de Paris," Revue de France, Supplement, 1871, 3.

¹⁸ Perhaps it should be noted that the editor of the Journal Officiel was Charles Longuet, a Proudhonist who had embraced collectivism. He was later to become a Marxist; indeed, he even married Marx's daughter.

workers and/or socialist and syndical bodies of commerce and industry to put into writing for the Commission of Work and Exchange any observations and information which might prove useful to the Commission. The National Guard pleaded solidarity in the struggle between exploitation and production.

If you want your children to be whole men, having the benefit of their work, and not some sort of animal dressed for the sweatshop or for combat ... If you desire finally the reign of justice — (it is in your hands) you who work and who search in good faith for the solution of social problems — march together united in progress.

Citizens were admonished by the Journal that they had, for the first time, accomplished a revolution of work by and for work.¹⁹

Proudhonist ideas of a more practical nature were also to be seen in the actions and proceedings of the Commune. Communards revealed decidedly Proudhonist tendencies as they discussed Beslay's plan relative to the Bank of France. They saw in Beslay's plan, which would result in an original creation of commercial spontaneity outside the "dangerous" patronage of the Bank of France, a solution which would remedy the needs of the particular situation of the movement and provide the fecund germ of a more general future solution. The Commune took a stand affirming its belief that commercial relationships were of a contractual nature and should be founded on reciprocal good faith. Any introduction of judiciaries into their rapports would be degrading to the negotiators.²⁰

On April 17, the Journal Officiel announced that workshops which had been abandoned by the exodus to Versailles would be taken over by the Commune and put under control of workers' syndicates.²¹ The out-

¹⁹ Journal officiel, XIV, XX.

²⁰ Les 31 séances, 8-9.

²¹ Journal officiel, XXXIV.

growth of another Proudhonian idea!

And the April 19 manifesto to the French people might have been written by Proudhon himself!

The absolute autonomy of the Commune is extended to all localities of France, assuring to each its integral rights and to every Frenchman the full exercise of his aptitudes, as a man, as a citizen and as a laborer. The Commune's autonomy will be limited only by the equal autonomy of all other Communes adhering to the contract; their associations must assure the liberty of France.²²

Such a federation was never to materialize. The Commune of Paris was isolated and condemned to perish, but its significance in the historiography of socialism has been momentous. Its immediate consequences for the French working-class movement were retaliation and repression. In the Commune, Proudhonian ideas had been joined with revolutionary practice. The theoretical bases of whatever emerged out of the repression following the Commune would have to be modified to take into consideration that reality.

²² Ibid., XXXIX, XL.

CHAPTER V

PROUDHON, LE PERE D'ANARCHISME: THE

SHAPING OF A MOVEMENT

1871 was a critical year for European socialism. The failure of the Commune helped to bring about the demise of the First International and the temporary eclipse of national socialist movements. The impact of the Commune was felt most severely among the French socialists, who had enjoyed wider support of the working masses than any other section of the International. The failure of the Commune had resulted in the reduction of this movement to virtual impotence. It had also demonstrated how extremely unlikely was the possibility of a successful proletarian revolution in other countries where workers were less well organized.¹

In theory as well as in practice, 1871 inaugurated a difficult period. The collapse of the International served to crystallize the differences between Marxist socialism and the tradition of socialism oriented toward the individual. Marxism tended to be ever more centralized and doctrinaire while in France, the theoretical and practical center of individualistic socialism during this period, the trend toward factionalism was accentuated. Out of the frustration of an unsuccessful revolution emerged two major currents for social change. One group,

¹G. D. H. Cole, Marxism and Anarchism, p. 163. Also Joll, The Anarchists, pp. 113-114.

sensing the hopelessness and danger of the use of violence, came to depend more and more on organized political parties and trade unions as instruments of reform. The other saw no alternative but to retaliate to the harsh realities of government suppression with increasing reliance on violence and revolutionary propaganda. "Propagande par le fait" merely provided the theoretical foundation for a strategy of hopelessness. Those who subscribed to this thinking were those with whom the term anarchism is usually associated, but the label is not always accurately applied. Moreover, the membership of these groups was never sharply defined, and frequent shifting of positions was not uncommon.

The most colorful, most dramatic influence on the anarchist movement in France, or elsewhere, in the 1870's and '80's was exerted by Mikhail Bakunin. He was more famous for his actions than for his thought. Prince Petr Kropotkin, another anarchist theorist, wrote in his Memoirs, "What struck me most was that Bakunin's influence was felt much less as the influence of an intellectual authority than as the influence of a moral personality."² Although Bakunin was a prolific writer, his works are fragmentary and often incoherent. He was, by temperament, more inclined to rely on the impact of the spoken word, on the inspiration of a given moment.³

In 1844 the young Bakunin made the pilgrimage to Paris that has always seemed a necessary component of a leftist education. Though he

²P. Kropotkin, Memoirs of a Revolutionist (2 vols.; London: Smith Elder and Co., 1899), II, p. 74.

³Carr, Bakunin, p. 167.

became acquainted with personalities of all opinions, he was close to none, with the exception of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. At this point Bakunin's beliefs were still in the nascent state. In fact, it would be twenty years before they were clearly formulated; but it was Proudhon more than any other man who was responsible for shaping Bakunin's instinctive rebelliousness into a definable creed.⁴ The strongly individualistic young Russian felt isolated by the narrow sectarianism of the various existing socialist groups. He could never sacrifice enough of his independence to belong to any group that he did not control. Max Nettlau, the eminent historian of anarchism, wrote, "It is impossible to imagine (Bakunin) as a ...Fourierist, Cabetist, or Marxist. The only man from whom he could derive part of his socialism was Proudhon."⁵ In later years Bakunin wrote of Proudhon in Federalism, Socialism, and Anti-Theologism:

The son of a peasant, and by his works and instinct, a hundred times more revolutionary than all the doctrinaire and bourgeois socialists, he equipped himself with a critical point of view, as ruthless as it was profound, and penetrating in order to destroy all their systems.⁶

His debt to Proudhon is readily apparent upon a survey of Bakunin's theories. A materialist like Proudhon, he saw the whole of human history, intellectual and moral, political and social, as a mere reflection of economic history and believed that the ideal society would likewise be

⁴Ibid., p. 131.

⁵Max Nettlau, "Mikhail Bakunin: A Biographical Sketch," in Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin, The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, compiled and edited by G. P. Maximoff (Clencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1953), p. 37.

⁶Bakunin, Political Philosophy, p. 278.

rooted in material conditions of existence. Also like Proudhon, his method of study was supposedly that of scientific observation.⁷

The socialism which he advocated was built upon a moral foundation: the self-esteem of man. The present state he rejected as immoral because it based its authority and control on the theoretical premise that man is inherently wicked. He believed true morality presupposed man's freedom to rely on his own innate moral ideas. Here Bakunin added a new dimension to Proudhon's thought: "Whatever man has, came down to him from his animal state—his spirit being simply the unfolding of his animal nature. Thus the idea of justice and good, like all other human things, must have had their root in man's very animality."⁸

By this time, no one is surprised to learn that justice must serve as the basis for Bakunin's 'brave, new world' and that justice can be consummated only in a social situation in which the only legal restraint is the force of contracts. The notion of an isolated, individual morality is self-contradictory because the innate law of justice presupposes the relations with other men. Man can achieve moral perfection only to the degree that he becomes aware of the essential dignity and rights of his fellow-beings in the "mirroring of his humanity...in the consciousness of his brothers."⁹

The envisioned society would lift man to the stature of a moral

⁷Ibid., pp. 65, 69.

⁸Ibid., pp. 74, 143, 125, 145, 121.

⁹Bakunin, Fédéralisme, socialisme et antithéologisme in Oeuvres, I, (3e ed. Paris: P. V. Stock, 1895), pp. 54-55, 16-18 quoted in Paul Eltzbacher, Anarchism, edited by James J. Martin, trans. by Steven R. Byington (New York: Libertarian Book Club, 1960), pp. 78, 84; Bakunin, Political Philosophy, pp. 121-125, 156; also Bakunin, Dieu et l'état (2e ed. Paris, 1892) pp. 277-78, quoted Eltzbacher, Anarchism, p. 84.

being and in the process humanize him (i.e., bring him to a self-conscious realization of his humanity) because it would be based on the value of work.¹⁰ Bakunin believed that there is a "prodigious moral power inherent in labor" and that man should be allowed to enjoy the wealth of society only to the extent that he contributes to it.¹¹ In order (a) that every man should have the material and moral means to develop his whole humanity, (b) that no man might be exploited by another, and (c) that each man may freely enjoy his share of the products of labor (which are in reality the products of collective efforts), all the land, instruments of production, and other capital should be collectively owned.¹²

Justice cannot triumph coexistent with private property, which is immoral because it is created by non-productive labor. Bakunin defined property in terms strikingly similar to those of Proudhon. He cited as examples of non-productive laborers the shareholders on the Stock Exchange, Napoleon III, and King William I. "All these people are workers," he said, "but what kind of workers! Highway robbers!...Since

¹⁰ Bakunin, Political Philosophy, p. 156. Bakunin saw work as a characteristic arising in man's animal stage of development. Work is a distinctly human feature in its progressiveness, in contrast to the stagnant work of animals to satisfy the fixed and limited needs of their intelligence. Ibid., p. 87.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 342; also Bakunin, Statuts secrets de l'alliance, p. 133, quoted in Eltzbacher, Anarchism, p. 88. This insistence that a man work for his keep injects a Puritan note entirely unexpected in a Russian nobleman.

¹² Bakunin, Statuts secrets, p. 133, quoted in Eltzbacher, Anarchism, p. 88. Bakunin's justification for the social revolution contradicts his theory of innate morality. In Federalisme he wrote that ideas about morality cannot be transmitted by heredity because there is no new physiological formation for every different idea; therefore, moral teachings must be transmitted through social traditions and education. In order to make men moral, their social environment must be made moral. Political Philosophy, pp. 151-155.

property is morality, it follows that morality, as the bourgeois understands it, consists in exploiting someone else's labor."¹³ It also follows, to use a favorite Bakunian phrase, that if property is theft, the proprietors are robbers!

He recalled Proudhon's statement that universal suffrage is counter-revolutionary (L'idée générale de la révolution) and warned that participation in the government can only be illusory and corrupting. The bourgeois republic can never be identified with liberty because it is rooted in exploitation. One who is sincerely desirous of the establishment of freedom and justice, the triumph of humanity, and the full and complete emancipation of the people should aim toward complete "destruction of all States and the establishment upon their ruins of a Universal Federation of Free Associations of all the countries in the world."¹⁴

Still following his mentor who had used Destruam et Aedificabo as the motto for Système des contradictions économiques, Bakunin saw the destruction of existing institutions as a creative art. The revolution would be a great act of justice based on the natural, rational human laws of morality. The army of the revolution could never be anything but the people; however, he did see the need for a revolutionary vanguard made up of those workers with the highest degree of class consciousness to form the staff of the revolutionary army.¹⁵

In Letters to a Frenchman, written in the hope of turning the

¹³ Ibid., p. 180.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 212-225.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 241, 376, 201-202; also Bakunin, Statuts secrets, p. 132, quoted in Eltzbacher, Anarchism, p. 92.

Prussian invasion of 1870 into a popular revolution, he declared, "The only thing that can save France in the face of the terrible, mortal dangers which menace it now is a spontaneous, formidable, passionately energetic, anarchic, destructive, and savage uprising of the people throughout France."¹⁶ The idea of revolutionary action as a liberating, saving force is salient throughout Bakunin's writing. George Woodcock says Bakunin came to see revolutionary actions as valid ends in themselves, capable of producing a kind of moral catharsis.¹⁷ In his exaltation of revolution, Bakunin again echoed Proudhon who had written to Antoine Gauthier on December 18, 1848, "Morbleu, let us revolutionize. It is the only good thing, the only reality in life."¹⁸

In many instances, Bakunin voiced his belief that violence was the necessary means of accomplishing the revolution. "This question cannot be solved without a clear and bloody struggle." "Was there ever, at any period, or in any country, a single example of a privileged and dominant class which granted concessions freely, spontaneously, and without being driven to it by force or fear?" "Bloody revolutions are often necessary, thanks to human stupidity; — yet they are always an evil, a monstrous evil and a great disaster." "The revolution will rage not against men but against relations and things." "After having assured your victory and having destroyed the power of your enemies, show yourselves humane toward the unfortunate stricken-down foes, henceforth disarmed and harm-

¹⁶Bakunin, Political Philosophy, p. 391.

¹⁷Woodcock, Anarchism, p. 175.

¹⁸Proudhon, Correspondance, II, p. 351.

less; recognize them as your brothers and invite them to live and work alongside of you upon the unshakable foundation of social equality."¹⁹ The ambivalent nature of Bakunin's conflicting thoughts regarding violence is obvious from these quotations. He accepted the necessity of using force, but considered the necessity regrettable.

He was insistent that at the time of the Revolution, deeds should count more than theories. Theoretical principles are important in the forming of a party in preparation for the revolution, he said, but when the time comes "to embark on the revolutionary high seas," ideas must be disseminated "not through words but through actions, for that is the most popular, the most potent and the most irresistible form of propaganda."²⁰

It may well be significant that most of Bakunin's writing dealing with the explicit use of force did not appear until 1870 or after.²¹ For a period of about a year during 1869-70, Bakunin was under the influence of a young Russian revolutionary named Nechaev, who was bold enough to press the anarchist negations of the state and conventional morality to its ultimate, logical conclusion. He raised the revolution

¹⁹Bakunin, Political Philosophy, p. 374, p. 377; Die Volkssache, p. 309; quoted in Eltzbacher, p. 89; Statuts secrets in Eltzbacher, p. 89; Political Philosophy, p. 377.

²⁰Bakunin, Political Philosophy, pp. 395-396.

²¹It is very difficult to study the development of Bakunin's thought or to ascertain, in some cases, when a particular article was written because he seldom finished writing an essay or book. Also many of his works were not published until many years after they were written. As far as this author can determine, Bakunin did not explicitly discuss the use of violence as a revolutionary method until around 1870.

to the status of absolute good and recognized no other kind of morality.²² The influence of Nechaev on Bakunin's thinking during this time is unquestionable. George Woodcock has said Bakunin was "always ready to be stirred by melodramatic dreams of blood and fire," and even before "was beset by the temptation to see his mission as a holy war in which evil must be destroyed to purify the world and make way for the heavenly kingdom."²³

During the spring and summer of 1869, Bakunin and Nechaev published together seven revolutionary pamphlets in Geneva. Some of the pamphlets were signed by Nechaev and some by Bakunin; others were published anonymously. In these pamphlets the moral force of revolution is seen as the justification for any act of terror or violence. "The revolutionary despises and hates present-day social morality in all its forms and motives. He regards everything as moral which helps the triumph of revolution." "In this struggle, revolution sanctifies everything else."²⁴

This brief association of Bakunin and Nechaev openly linked the anarchist movement with the practice of terrorism. Le propagande par le fait provided the impetus for much anarchist action for the twenty-five to thirty years. Bart F. Hoselitz, writing in the Preface to the Maximoff compilation of Bakunin's political philosophy has suggested that liberty has always been the main concern of anarchist thought. But the theme of violence was introduced by Bakunin whose original contribution "lies in

²²Carr, Bakunin, p. 376.

²³Woodcock, Anarchism, p. 174.

²⁴Revolutionary Catechism and Principles of Revolution quoted in Carr, Bakunin, p. 380.

the weaving together of both themes into a consistent whole."²⁵

Professor Hoselitz's interpretation is certainly open to question. In the first place, Bakunin's philosophy is nowhere consistent. Secondly, the use of violence as a method of achieving popular demands had been sanctioned in France since the Revolution of 1789. Beneath all the intensity in the terrorist philosophy of Bakunin and Nechaev can be found ideas advocated by the first man to call himself an anarchist, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: the fruitlessness of trying to gain liberty through existing "democratic" processes, the necessity for the people to liberate themselves, the regenerating and revivifying power of revolution. And these are moral ideas - concerned with the means by which men can achieve the fullness of their human potential.

The influence of Proudhon on Bakunin, resulting from a brief association in Paris in the mid-1840's, has already been demonstrated. Bakunin's impression of Proudhon as a revolutionary personality is extremely important. Though the germ of all of Proudhon's doctrines was present in Qu'est-ce que la propriété? (1840), at the time he met Bakunin, his thinking had been concentrated more on the destruction of existing society than on concrete post-revolutionary plans.²⁶

It is true that Proudhon himself sought to bring change by peaceful example of cooperative organizations. He felt that overt revolutionary action would be an appeal to arbitrariness and he feared a new tyranny

²⁵Hoselitz, "Preface" in Bakunin, Political Philosophy, p. 14

²⁶This conclusion is based upon a study of Proudhon's writings up to that time. Another significant factor is the timing of his acquaintance with Bakunin. He met the Russian while on a visit to Paris from Lyons where he was intimately associated with the Mutualists, many of whom were known to be violent insurrectionists.

might arise from intolerance. In his famous letter to Marx, he wrote: "I would prefer to burn property over a slow fire, rather than give it new strength by making a St. Bartholomew's night of the proprietors."²⁷

Nevertheless, even Proudhon implied, especially during the 1848 revolutions, that violence or the threat of violence might be justified. Other people certainly associated him with the violence of the revolution. The anarchists who accepted violence as a means in reality accepted the French tradition of violent popular action in the name of liberty, and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was the first of the anarchists to contribute to that tradition.²⁸

It was Bakunin who was most responsible for making of Proudhon's seminal ideas into an international collectivist movement. An example of his mode of operation can be seen in the Lyons fiasco of 1870. In September of that year, Bakunin traveled to Lyons from Switzerland where he had already expressed his views on how to "save" France in Letters to a Frenchman. He had come to join with Albert Richard, a leader in the collectivist movement there, and others of his friends in promulgating a revolution in the wake of Louis Napoleon's fall. Like most of Bakunin's revolutionary endeavors, this affaire ended in failure, but not before Bakunin had time to establish a set of his famous committees. The "Federated Committees for the Saving of France," as he called them, were dedicated to the Proudhonist principle of anarchistic federation of independent local communes. When the whole plan fell through, Bakunin

²⁷ Proudhon à Marx, 17 mai 1846, Correspondance, II, pp. 198-202.

²⁸ This is not to suggest that Proudhon was the inspirer of Vaillant, Ravachol, or other anarchist terrorists. To make such a claim would be grossly unfair to both sides.

fled in disillusion and despair. Lyons, however, remained the center of the Bakuninist movement in France; there Bakunin's ideas found a congenial soil and struck deep roots.²⁹

Such remnants of the International as survived the Hague Congress were Bakuninist in inspiration. A congress held in St. Imier, Switzerland, in 1872 re-established the International Workingmen's Association on the basis of a formula which granted complete autonomy to all local sections in the confederation. Its aim was to facilitate the formation of a free proletarian economic federalism which would be based on work and human equality and which came into existence only through the spontaneous action of the proletariat itself in trade societies and self-governing communes. Any political organization was declared to be unnecessary and detrimental.³⁰

In September, 1873, a meeting described as the Sixth General Congress of the International Workingmen's Association was held in Geneva. The delegates contended that they, not the Marxists, constituted the true Internationalists. They voted to abolish the General Council and revise the rules of the organization so as to make perfectly clear their intention to abstain from political involvement. This was a significant step and provided the settlement for an old Marxist-Proudhonist argument which could be traced back to the founding of the International. At first the admission of non-workers was opposed, but the congress finally decided

²⁹Carr, Bakunin, pp. 402-403, 415-416.

³⁰This information about the meetings of the Anarchist International was drawn from Cole, Marxism and Anarchism, pp. 202-203; Stekloff, First International, pp. 287-289; Woodcock, Anarchism, pp. 246-250.

to admit those who were not at that time actively engaged in manual labor but who shared a proletarian perspective.³¹

The manifesto of the Anarchist International, as this anti-authoritarian group came to be called, denounced in moralistic Proudhonian terms the state and property-holders alike as exploiters, and showed how the germ of Proudhon's ideas had developed in the atmosphere of Bakuninism.

We despise all legal means because they are a negation of our rights.

We do not want universal suffrage to make ourselves accomplices in crimes committed by our so-called representatives.

We wish to remain our own masters.

We know that individual freedom cannot exist with the union of other free associates.

All live by the support one of another.

Every social product is a work of the whole community to which all have claim in equal manner-- For we are Communists.³²

The 1874 Bulletin of the Bakuninist Jura Federation, which was always the core of the Anarchist International, actually proclaimed that: "Anarchy is not an invention of Bakunin; if one wishes to link it to men's names, it would be necessary to say Proudhonian anarchy -- for Proudhon is the veritable father of the anarchist theory." ³³

The relationship of this internationalist movement of the 1870's to the working-class movement in France may not be altogether clear until one considers the fact that most French labor leaders who had escaped execution during the fall of the Commune were in exile. Many

³¹ Compte-rendu officiel du sixième congrès général de l'association internationale des travailleurs (Locle: Au siège du comité fédéral jurassien, 1874).

³² J. Salwyn Schapiro, Movements of Social Dissent in Modern Europe, Anvil Books (Princeton, N. J.: D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1962), pp. 140-141.

³³ Quoted in Maitron, Histoire du mouvement anarchiste, p. 35

of them were actively involved in the Anarchist International, and the anarchist documents accurately reflect their thinking at this time. Among these were Paul Brousee, Benoit Malon, and Jules Guesde, who later deserted the anarchists to develop more politically oriented workers' movements in France after the period of repression was ended. That they were all more or less Proudhonist at one stage of their intellectual development is a significant indication. Though they came to avow other schools of thought, traces of Proudhonism remained a part of their thinking.

In 1877 a small group of these French anti-authoritarians met at La Chaux-de-Fonds and refounded the French section to become a part of the Anarchist International. The two principal leaders were Paul Brousee and Louis-Jean Pindy. Brousee began the publication of a journal called L'Avant-Garde from the Swiss Jura in 1877. The motto of the first issue was "Collectivism, Anarchy, and Free Federation." Brousee called for the abolition of the state and its replacement by a society based on contract: "the free formation of human groups around each need, each interest, and the free federation of these groups."³⁴ Pindy, who had been active in the Paris section of the First International and also in the Commune, became corresponding secretary of the new section, with the responsibility of maintaining contacts with the underground workers' groups in France. Brousee was also active in rebuilding an undercover French workers' movement.

When Bakunin died in 1876, his position as the pre-eminent anarchist

³⁴Quoted in Woodcock, Anarchism, p. 293.

theorician was quickly filled by another disenchanted Russian aristocrat. If Bakunin had represented "the sound and the fury" of the anarchist movement, Prince Petr Kropotkin projected its "sweetness and light." He was poetic, respectable, scholarly--even saintly, according to some descriptions. The anarchist prince began to consider himself a socialist after reading Proudhon's Contradictions économiques in the early 1860's.³⁵ His first anarchist essay, Should We Occupy Ourselves with Examining the Ideals of a Future Society?, of which no printed copy exists, was written in the 1870's. The influence of Proudhon and Bakunin appeared even then in his advocacy of the substitution of labor checks for money, the formation of the consumers' and producers' co-operatives, and the ownership of land and factories by workers' associations. He explicitly emphasized that the revolution must originate among the people themselves and argued that work should be a universal obligation in the society to be established after the revolution.³⁶

Kropotkin's anarchist ideas were grounded in an instinctive reaction to the repressions of the autocratic czarist government, but they found expression in a scientific theory of social evolution. According to his own account of his views in the eleventh edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica (for which he wrote the article on "Anarchism"), his efforts were threefold. He tried to show the intimate logical connection between the modern philosophy of the natural sciences and anarchism; he tried to put anarchism on the scientific basis by a study of the

³⁵ George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, The Anarchist Prince (London: T. V. Boardman and Co., Ltd., 1950), p. 57.

³⁶ Woodcock, Anarchism, p. 196.

tendencies apparent in society which might indicate its further evolution; and he attempted to work out a basis for the anarchist ethic.³⁷

Man's actions, Kropotkin believed, are performed in answer to some need in his nature. A man could more easily walk on all four's than he could rid himself of his innate moral consciousness for it is anterior in his animal evolution even to his upright posture; it is as natural to him as the sense of smell or touch.³⁸ As he struggles to achieve whole manhood, man recognizes the same effort on the part of other men and makes the old maxim, 'Do unto others as you would have done to you in like case,' his guide to human relationships. In practical application this means that the principle of justice--as Proudhon defined it--operates naturally among men. If these moral sentiments are repressed or perverted as in the capitalistic system, man cannot develop to the highest limits of his human capacity as he should according to the evolutionary law of the progress of mankind.³⁹

Kropotkin traced the evolution of law and concluded that written, enacted law, which postdates the real, natural laws of man, restrains unnecessarily and must be abolished as a step toward the happiness of man.⁴⁰ He believed that the norms of unwritten customs, based on the general will of the people, would suffice to maintain good understanding. In making scientific studies in Siberia, he had observed that competition

³⁷Kropotkin, "Anarchism," Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th ed., I, 918.

³⁸Kropotkin, Revolutionary Pamphlets (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968), pp. 88, 98.

³⁹Any such hindrance of evolutionary development makes revolution justifiable. Kropotkin, La Morale anarchiste (Paris, 1891), pp. 30-31, 74, quoted in Eltzbacher, p. 98.

⁴⁰Law and Authority in Kropotkin, Revolutionary Pamphlets, pp. 196ff.

between the species and cooperation within a species were major factors in the struggle for survival. Therefore, man's predominant sentiments are those which propel him toward cooperation and mutual aid in order that his species may survive.⁴¹

A new morality on the basis of these instincts could only be built, Kropotkin thought, in a new economic order from which the last vestiges of bourgeois rule, "its morality drawn from account books," have been removed.⁴² The state and private property, which offend against justice, would have to disappear in the social revolution. Up to this point Kropotkin built his evolutionary philosophy on the framework already laid down by Proudhon, but in his vision of the new society, he went beyond both Proudhon and Bakunin. Kropotkin foresaw the next phase in the evolution of society springing up immediately upon the ruins of capitalism as soon as the revolution had been accomplished. Men would join themselves together by means of voluntary contracts in a system of communal ownership of the means of production and the products of labor, which would be called anarchist communism.⁴³ Proudhon had preferred that each man retain possession of his own instruments of production in a system of mutualism; Bakunin had advocated collective ownership of the

⁴¹Kropotkin, Anarchist Communism (2nd ed. London, 1895) quoted in Eltzbacher, p. 24; also Kropotkin, Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution (London, 1902), p. 34, cited in Joll, The Anarchists, p. 155. Interestingly, Kropotkin admitted that people do have selfish instincts as well as good ones and urged education to combat them. Kropotkin, Ethics, Origin and Development (Eng. ed. New York, 1924), p. 22, cited in Joll, The Anarchists, p. 156.

⁴²Kropotkin, The Conquest of Bread (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), p. 221.

⁴³Kropotkin, Paroles d'un Révolté quoted in Eltzbacher, pp. 90, 116.

means of production, thus making the association which Proudhon had conceded could be a means of gaining control, into the central principle of the economic organization of society.

Both had stopped short of distribution of goods on the basis of need. Proudhon stressed exchange of products for products, and Bakunin insisted that a man share in the community's wealth only to the extent that he contributed to it. Kropotkin, too, believed in the value of work, but thought need superseded service; besides, in the present state of technology, exact measures of the value of individual labor would be impossible. Everyone should have the right to live a comfortable life, and if society were properly organized, the common stock of goods would suffice to fill the needs of all. A man would be expected to contribute in accordance with his powers and could in return expect his wants to be supplied from the common storehouse.⁴⁴ Kropotkin acknowledged the possibility of aberrant individuals who work less or consume more than their share, but he anticipated that these "ghosts of the bourgeois society," may expect to feel the effects of moral pressure to conform from individual citizens and from society as a whole.⁴⁵ How interesting this strain of puritanism in a libertarian theorist!

In contrast to Bakunin who seemed to think the new order could not emerge without a bloody clash, Kropotkin suggested that it might emerge out of the natural process of evolution.⁴⁶ In The Anarchist Idea from

⁴⁴Kropotkin, Conquest of Bread, p.14.

⁴⁵Kropotkin, Paroles d'un Révolté, pp. 110, 134-135, and Revolutionary Studies, p. 30, quoted in Eltzbacher, p. 101.

⁴⁶Kropotkin, "Anarchism," Encyclopedia Britannica, 914,918.

the Point of View of its Practical Realization, he stressed the need for local communes already in existence to carry out the revolution and collectivize the means of production.⁴⁷ Although the people must complete the task, Kropotkin recognized the need for an enlightened vanguard to foresee the course of evolution and prepare the masses for their liberation.⁴⁸

It was Kropotkin's opinion that the anarchists' acts of violence came in retaliation to violent prosecutions directed against them from above by the government. Violent acts were resorted to only in the proportion to which open action was obstructed by severe repression.⁴⁹ He personally found the use of violence as a method distasteful, but he accepted it as an unavoidable side effect of revolutions, which were inevitable as man moved forward according to the law of progress.⁵⁰ Besides, there were situations in which its use was justified. He wrote to a British friend in 1893:

We who in our houses seclude ourselves from the cry and sight of human sufferings, we are no judges of those who live in the midst of all this hell of suffering...Personally, I hate these explosions, but I cannot stand as a judge to condemn those who are driven to despair.⁵¹

⁴⁷Cited in Woodcock, Anarchism, p. 203.

⁴⁸Kropotkin, Paroles, quoted in Eltzbacher, p. 119.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 916. The editor of Encyclopedia Britannica did not agree with Kropotkin and appended an editorial note to the article on "Anarchism" to clarify for his reading public the connection of known anarchists with "murderous outrages." Pp. 916-917.

⁵⁰Kropotkin, "Anarchism," 914.

⁵¹Kropotkin to Mrs. Dryhurst, 1893, quoted in Woodcock and Avakumovic, Anarchist Prince, p. 248.

As an anarchist propagandist, Kropotkin played an important role in encouraging violence where it seemed necessary. In the anarchist journal Le Révolté he wrote in 1879: "Permanent revolt by word of mouth, in writing, by the dagger, rifle, dynamite...Everything is good for us which falls outside legality."⁵² He had learned from practical experience early in life in Siberia the absolute impossibility of doing anything for the masses by means of the administrative machinery.⁵³ In Conquest of Bread he wrote of the joy with which the revolution would be accomplished by the proletarian axe, and remembered that Proudhon had said "In destroying we shall build."⁵⁴

But Kropotkin, like Bakunin, was sure that excessive cruelty was unnecessary. "Naturally, the fight will demand victims, but the people will never, like kings and czars, exalt terror into a system...They have sympathy for the victims, they are too goodhearted not to feel a speedy repugnance at cruelty."⁵⁵ Kropotkin was, of course, projecting his own repugnance onto the abstract masses.

By observing the people in czarist Russia, he had learned the difference between acting on the principle of command and acting on the principle of common understanding. He preferred the latter and believed it was the natural mode of behavior. He had made no claim to formulate a system and was forced to admit exceptions even in attempting to put

⁵²Quoted in Maitron, Histoire du mouvement anarchiste, p. 70.

⁵³Kropotkin, Memoirs, I, p. 249.

⁵⁴Kropotkin, Conquest of Bread, p. 221.

⁵⁵Kropotkin, Revolutionary Studies, quoted in Eltzbacher, p. 216.

anarchism on an evolutionary basis.

Neither did he create a new movement. In defending himself before the police court in Lyons in 1883, Kropotkin denied that he had instigated the anarchist movement. "The real father of anarchy," he said, "was the immortal Proudhon who exposed it for the first time in 1848."⁵⁶ Kropotkin's ideas on anarchist communism made a significant contribution to the intellectual tradition of Proudhon and Bakunin, and his activities of propaganda and agitation helped to keep the anarchist movement going when the International declined into oblivion shortly after Bakunin's death.

The Prince was especially excited about the possibilities of reviving the workers' movement in France. In the Jura, where he lived and worked in the late 1870's, he collaborated with ex-communards who were dedicated to the proletarian cause. Among them were Louis-Jean Pindy, Gustave Lefrancais, Elisée Reclus, the famed French geographer, and Paul Brousse who had just returned from a secret trip to southern France. Small, clandestine organizations of Bakuninist tendencies had been in existence around Lyons since 1872. Kropotkin was so encouraged by what he heard that he wrote to a friend, "The awakening is increasing (the Paris students take part in it with enthusiasm) and the tendency purely anarchist. France, France is the refrain everywhere..."⁵⁷

There is no doubt that Kropotkin's services were valuable to the exiled French revolutionaries. He involved himself in writing propaganda

⁵⁶ Quoted in Maitron, Histoire du mouvement anarchiste, p. 36.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Woodcock and Avakumovic, Anarchist Prince, p. 154

and speaking at congresses. After L'Avant-Garde was suppressed in 1878, he assumed the editorship of a new journal which was called Le Révolté. In 1881 he lived for a short time in French Savoy and made a speaking tour through several French towns. He also traveled to Paris to visit Jean Grave, a young anarchist shoemaker who sent him articles for La Révolte. Grave was later to emerge as one of the foremost anarchist journalists in France.

In December of 1882, Kropotkin, along with some sixty-odd other anarchists, was arrested in connection with a violent miners' strike at Monceau-les-Mines, an episode with which he had no apparent connection. The real reasons for his arrest were more serious ones. The French anarchist group at La Chaux-de-Fonds, with which he was known to have associated, had approved the principle of propaganda by the deed. In 1881 the anarchists in France had publicly demonstrated their militance by withdrawing from the National Labor Congress to hold their own Revolutionary Socialist Congress. They had approved propaganda by the deed and the abolition of property and had opposed any participation in political action.⁵⁸ To say that Kropotkin was responsible for these actions would be ridiculous, but the trend towards open militance among anarchists had been increasing since he had arrived in western Europe. He was closely connected with the major anarchist paper and had an international reputation as an anarchist theoretician. The outbreak of a series of violent activities coincident with his return to France late in 1882 seemed just too incriminating! There was no evidence to link

⁵⁸Woodcock, Anarchism, pp. 293-295.

him to the miners' violence, however, so he was convicted on a charge of belonging to the International, which had been proscribed since 1872, and imprisoned at Clairvaux for three years.

The reactions of the French people to these proceedings provide an indication as to Kropotkin's influence in France. Street demonstrations were held outside his home; the French Academy of Sciences offered to send him books so that he could continue his research while in prison; and a resolution for amnesty was introduced into the Chamber of Deputies by Clemenceau and received a hundred votes.

Upon his eventual release in January of 1886, he went to Paris to continue his anarchist work. Soon realizing, however, that he had become a rallying-point for social discontent, he decided to move to England rather than risk deportation. On the eve of his departure, he delivered, to an audience of several thousand, a farewell address on "Anarchism and Its Place in Socialist Evolution."⁵⁹

After 1886 his connection with the French anarchist movement was less direct. Jean Grave, Elie and Elisée Reclus, and others continued their work of fostering the anarchist movement with propaganda articles, philosophical works, congresses and discussions. They added little to Kropotkin's philosophy of anarchist communism, but helped to popularize his ideals.⁶⁰

While the leaders were thus preoccupied with peaceful pursuits, many anarchist militants were putting into practice the principle of propagande par le fait. Although these were mainly fringe elements--

⁵⁹The information relating to Kropotkin's activities in France was drawn from Kropotkin, Memoirs, II, pp. 189-306 and Woodcock and Avakumovic, The Anarchist Prince, pp. 173-199.

⁶⁰Joll, The Anarchists, p. 162

and sometimes common criminals--they succeeded in arousing public sympathy and fear to the extent that periodic repressions were the pattern of the 1880's and early 1890's. In desperation and in the hope of attracting a popular base so as to survive as a movement, anarchists began to enter the ranks of organized labor. Despite a few sporadic efforts to reorganize an anarchist international, all that remained of the purely anarchist movement was a propaganda organization.

CHAPTER VI

L'ATELIER FERA DISPARAITRE LE GOUVERNEMENT:

PROUDHONIST INFLUENCES IN THE SYNDICALIST MOVEMENT

Another trend which was given impetus by the events of 1871 was the French trade union movement. Many Frenchmen, reacting in frustration and fear to the harshness with which the Commune was put down, thought trade unions and political parties were safer means to a changed society than the anarchist methods. Some working people turned increasingly to either unions or parties rather than to both so that eventually the political and syndicalist movements diverged. Proudhonist influences were apparent within the union movement from its earliest mutualist stages even before the Commune. These tendencies continued to be evident through anarcho-syndicalism to the final grand phase of revolutionary syndicalism after which the movement lost its revolutionary mystique to return to lackluster trade unionism.

By the late 1870's, local associations of workers in various trades were formed in Paris. These were called chambres syndicales and were mostly mutualist in orientation. They remained weak and largely ineffectual until after the 1884 law legalizing unions. Trade unionism then grew rapidly, and syndicalism began to take shape as a clearly defined doctrine of direct action.

With the infiltration of the anarchists into the trades union move-

ment, anarcho-syndicalism was born. This movement was Proudhonian in inspiration insofar as it was committed to direct action, independent of political parties, in pursuit of social and economic gains. As in Proudhon's programme, the syndicate, or voluntary association of workers, became the nucleus for a direct, revolutionary mass struggle in which the workers themselves in their workshops would take over the means of production. The emphases were on industrial action, rather than on conspiracy or insurrection, and on the need for the working man himself to achieve his own liberation.

The method was to be the general strike, to be conducted without coercion, every individual worker striking in response to the demands of conscience. The Proudhonian tradition was clearly reflected in this emphasis on the primary responsibility of the individual to himself, even when involved in group action. The theory of la grève générale was founded on the "seductive simplicity" of personal involvement that is essential in appeal to the anarchist purist and the workman alike!¹ The plan gave direction to labor union activities and helped to toughen the workers' resistance in their immediate struggle for the necessities of living and the defense of their human rights. At the same time, it demonstrated their ethical concepts: that each man has a certain dignity and worth as a human being, that action should be based upon one's own moral ideas, that oppressive governmental

¹Harvey Goldberg, The Life of Jean Jaurès (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962), p. 169.

restrictions should be defied if they violate the bounds of one's conscience, and that voluntary cooperation among individuals may result in the betterment of all.² Once society was paralyzed by the general strike, the anarcho-syndicalists intended to take over the means of production and distribution of goods, overthrow the state and usher in the libertarian millenium in which the labor organization would be the formative unit.³

Revolutionary syndicalism derived its anarchist features less from the syndicate proper than from the horizontally organized Bourses du Travail. The syndicates were unions of workers in individual factories and in some cases individual industries. From the 1880's on, the Bourses du Travail were formed alongside the syndicates, as the workers in all trades in a particular locality would organize to find jobs or to discuss their problems as members of the working class. But the Bourses quickly became known as centers of education.⁴ The absence of education outside the influence of the state had been an almost insurmountable obstacle to the development and efficacy of the labor movement. The workers in a town or city, joined in a horizontal union, could learn of other workers' situations so that they could intelligently compare their working conditions and salaries with the resources of their industry.⁵

²Rudolph Rocker, "Anarcho-Syndicalism" in Eltzbacher, Anarchism, p. 252.

³Woodcock, Anarchism, p. 323.

⁴Joll, The Anarchists, p. 197.

⁵Edouard Dolléans, Histoire du mouvement ouvrier, II, p. 35.

The Fédération des Bourses du Travail was virtually assured success in 1895 when Fernand Pelloutier became its secretary-general. His extraordinary organizational and administrative abilities, his moral enthusiasm, and his dedication to the ideals of education and self-improvement among the workers made him an almost legendary figure. He became the leading theorist for the syndicalist movement, which achieved unity when the Bourses du Travail and the syndicate organization, the Confédération Générale du Travail, merged in 1902.

Pelloutier was not interested in formulating a new revolutionary ideology, and his thought represents no anarcho-syndicalist system. He was, rather, a man of action and practicality, who hoped to convince working-class people of their capabilities to direct their own institutions if they would but cease "to be hypnotized by political utopias."⁶

He explicitly placed himself in Proudhon's "cranky and paradoxical tradition of moralistic radicalism."⁷ He admired Proudhon because he unashamedly established morality as the criterion, not only for social action, but for any science or metaphysics, whereas the so-called scientific socialists created complicated sophistic arguments on which to base their utopian ideals.⁸ On the occasion of Pelloutier's death, his friend and disciple, Paul Delasalle, wrote in the anarchist journal Les Temps nouveaux, "Fédéraliste et communist-anarchist convaincu, il

⁶George Sorel, Preface to Fernand Pelloutier, Histoire des bourses du travail (Paris: Librairie C. Reinwald, 1902), p. 1.

⁷Alan B. Spitzer, "Anarchy and Culture: Fernand Pelloutier and the Dilemma of Revolutionary Syndicalism," International Review of Social History, VIII (1963), 331.

⁸A. Dufresne et F. Pelloutier, "Proudhon philosophe," La Revue socialiste, III (Oct. 1899), 482-485.

aimait à citer et à évoquer Proudhon qu'il connaissait à fond."⁹

Pelloutier himself refused to separate theoretical from moral considerations. He cherished above all the ideas of self-emancipation acquired by continual efforts to perfect oneself. He saw the Bourses as the principal instrument of this self-emancipation for the working classes in restoring to the workers the consciousness of their human dignity. No institution of the existing, immoral state could accomplish this, because exploitation by the state and the capitalist system had been responsible for destroying working-class dignity in the first place. The answer lay in the people themselves. The Bourses should be centers of education where the people could reflect on their conditions and prepare themselves for their liberation. Pelloutier envisioned, and the Bourses organized to some extent, libraries, professional courses, economic and technical conferences and medical services.¹⁰ He believed ideas were the motors of social progress, asserting "la tendance fatale de l'humanité vers la nouveauté des idées et des vues, source du progrès."¹¹ Therefore, the education of the masses was the very condition of their revolutionary consciousness. Pelloutier hoped, however, that the Bourses could be used not only to enlighten the masses but also to alleviate the debasing and cheapening of working-class life brought on by the pervasive effects of a commercialized culture.¹²

⁹Paul Delasalle, article in Les Temps nouveaux, Du 23 au 29 mars 1901, quoted in Spitzer, "Anarchy and Culture," 381.

¹⁰Pelloutier, Histoire des bourses du travail, pp. 114-115.

¹¹Ibid., p. 55.

¹²Spitzer, "Anarchy and Culture," 387.

He believed that the achievement of genuine social equality depended upon liquidation of the money economy, which provided governments and capitalists with their best means of worker exploitation. Any apparent benefits gained by the workers could be wiped out by raising prices to compensate for the diminution of profits.¹³ Pelloutier demanded the destruction of this source of evil, but realized it would not disappear overnight. He accepted the general strike as the revolutionary method and knew that his efforts could best be spent in preparing the workers for their participation in it. Though he had a Proudhonian faith in the capacity of the working man and in the regenerative powers of revolution, he recognized that the destruction of capitalism would not guarantee the immediate regeneration of its victims.¹⁴ Men would have to make themselves worthy of the future, and the Bourses provided the best instrument for "the moral, administrative and technical education necessary to render viable a society of free men."¹⁵

At the same time, the Bourses offered a live alternative to the state. Pelloutier urged his followers to keep their revolutionary goal ever in mind; in the future society, they would all be free producers, voluntarily associated in the Bourse (or syndicate — after 1902 the terms were interchangeable) which would assume all the positive functions now supposedly performed by the state.¹⁶

¹³Pelloutier, article in Les Temps nouveaux, Du 14 au 20 sept 1895, pp. 126 ff., cited in Spitzer, "Anarchy and Culture," 383.

¹⁴Pelloutier, L'art et la révolte (Paris, 1896), p. 22, quoted in Spitzer, 383.

¹⁵Pelloutier, Histoire, p. 160.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 163, 184-185.

Pelloutier successfully combined revolutionary zeal with a businessman's skill, mingled exhortations to bring down the capitalist system with practical efforts to bring about its demise. He has been praised for recognizing that the quality of the new order would depend on the moral calibre of the men who constructed it and for transforming rather unexciting, gradualist notions of working-class education and self-help into a revolutionary mystique.¹⁷

Pelloutier and fin de siècle syndicalism provided a legacy for a retired and aging civil engineer who turned to the syndicalist movement in disillusion after the Dreyfus Affair. Georges Sorel was full of contempt for all things political and sought a new force to rejuvenate society. Writing in the Preface to Pelloutier's Histoire des bourses du travail, he applauded Pelloutier for realizing that there was no hope of reconciliation with the old order and for helping to establish the means for the final break with bourgeois traditions in the Bourses.¹⁸

The cause Sorel espoused came to be called revolutionary syndicalism. It was still close to anarcho-syndicalism, but was distinguished from it by several traits, notably in its insistence on the mystical, purifying qualities of the violent revolution and on the almost spiritual vision of the society to come. With Sorel as its prophet, revolutionary syndicalism ushered the trade union movement into its most violently active period.

¹⁷ Maitron, Histoire, pp. 281-282 and Cole, A History of Socialist Thought, Vol. III, Part I, The Second International, 1889-1914 (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1960), p. 336.

¹⁸ Sorel, Preface to Pelloutier, Histoire, p. 26.

Sorel's thought is as unsystematic and difficult to follow as that of Proudhon with whom he often identified himself as a proletarian theorist. The real unity of Sorel's work can be found in its impetus: an unremitting search for a "mechanism already in existence capable of guaranteeing the development of morality."¹⁹ He conceived of his search for a regenerating social force as moral in the essential sense of the term: it concerned the relationships of man with his fellow beings.

He was convinced, as Proudhon had been before him, that France had lost her morals and was threatened with decadence. He pertinaciously quoted the opening sentence of Proudhon's De la justice, "La France a perdu ses mœurs," and preached that "The world will become more just only to the extent to which it becomes more chaste."²⁰ Like Proudhon, he was often nostalgic for a vanished past where men were bound to each other by ties deeper than those of the present greedy and utilitarian society. He was convinced that capitalism had perverted the fundamental human attribute (man's ability to produce) and should be destroyed.²¹

In 1892 Sorel wrote a series of two critical essays on Proudhon's philosophy for Revue philosophique. He underscored Proudhon's idea that work is the emission of the human spirit but pointed out that the only real originality in Proudhon's theories lay in the notion that the work

¹⁹Sorel, "Avenir socialiste des syndicats" in Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat (Paris: Librairie des sciences politiques et sociales, 1921), p. 127.

²⁰Ibid., p. 199 and Sorel, Réflexions sur la violence (10e éd. Paris: Librairie Marcel Rivière et cie, 1946), p. 332.

²¹Sorel, Introduction à l'économie moderne (2e éd. Paris: Librairie des sciences politiques et sociales, 1922), p. 131.

of the individual is something incommensurable.²² He concluded that much of Proudhon's thinking was irrefutable and admonished those who would do justice to the "real thought" of Proudhon not to take Proudhon too liberally or insist too much on the consequences of his formulae taken in an absolute sense.²³ Although he admitted some difficulty in tracing the idea of justice back to its genesis,²⁴ Sorel felt that the only significant limitation to Proudhon's thought was that he did not develop the idea of the rightness of force.²⁵

Sorel believed that all great movements are impelled by myths, which are the expression of the strongest beliefs of the group. He saw the compelling myth of the working-class movement in the general strike. The practical success or failure of the strike was inconsequential in comparison to the moral role which it played in the lives of the strikers in sustaining their faith (and there is a religious element involved here!) in the revolutionary action and in themselves. Impelled by a charismatic excitement, the strikers, while part of a group uprising, could still qualify as individualists.²⁶

The method of the revolution for Sorel was to be violence, and every action of the workers should be considered an act of class warfare. He

²²Sorel, "Essai sur la philosophie de Proudhon," Revue philosophique, XXXIII (juin 1892), 626, 628.

²³Ibid., XXXIV (juillet 1892), 65.

²⁴Ibid., p. 44. Father de Lubac, a modern Jesuit scholar, agrees that Sorel's point is well taken for Proudhon declines to admit any origin of justice. Instead, he merely proclaims that it is immanent in man's nature. Henri de Lubac, The Un-Marxian Socialist, trans. by Canon R. E. Scantlebury (London: Sheed and Ward, 1948), p. 246.

²⁵Sorel, "Essai," XXXIV, 51.

²⁶Sorel, Réflexions sur la violence, pp. 42-46, 50, 374-75.

believed violence, which he defined as simply the refusal to compromise in word and deed, was a fact of history and no apology need be made for it. He wrote in Les Illusions du progrès:

Do not converse with despotism. Don't permit yourself to believe that you take its legality seriously and that you dream of overcoming it by means of imperial law. You would lower yourself, and one fine day, without your knowing it, you will find yourself caught in the trap and humiliated. What is necessary is energetic war, a clandestine press, open disapproval, conspiracy, if need be...²⁷

He thought proletarian violence was not only a necessity, but could be a very beautiful and heroic action with a purifying value all its own. Drawing heavily on Henri Bergson's Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience, he described occasions of overt violent acts as "those rare moments of intuition" when the individual takes possession of himself and is completely free.²⁸ It is a contradiction worthy of Proudhon that, although he himself was not consciously anti-intellectual, he fostered a tradition that was decidedly so.

According to Sorel, the working classes alone still possessed the moral integrity to effect a revolution, for they were the only ones who still retained an awareness of man's essential nature as a producer. They alone continued to search for moral improvement and recognized that possibility of progrès indéfini in their workshop organizations. Consequently, the future of socialism would reside in the autonomous development of workers' syndicates.²⁹

²⁷ Sorel, Les Illusions du progrès (5e éd. Paris: Librairie Marcel Rivière et cie., 1947), pp. 384-385.

²⁸ Sorel, Réflexions, p. 42.

²⁹ Sorel, "Avenir" in Matériaux, pp. 128, 133, and Réflexions, pp. 345, 377.

Sorel envisioned the syndicalist society, after the final apocalyptic general strike, as a society of producers without the state. Indeed, it would be a society of heroes of production, each continually striving for his own perfection. This striving would assure the continued progress of mankind.³⁰

A puritanical Proudhonist who thought that no writer had defined the principles of morality more forcefully than le maître, Sorel was dedicated to the search for a regenerating social force which would reassert the dignity of mankind. In revolutionary syndicalism he believed he had found it.

Two other syndicalist leaders must be considered, Paul Delesalle and Emile Pouget, collaborators with Pelloutier in building the syndicalist movement. Both were activists who sought to give syndicalism expression in their writings. An assistant to Pelloutier and a protégé of Sorel, Delesalle was a militant who saw the syndicate as an instrument of struggle and drew up a battle plan:

- (1) A general strike by individual unions, which we can compare to maneuvers of garrisons
- (2) Cessation of work everywhere on a given day, which we can compare to general maneuvers
- (3) A general and complete stoppage which places the proletariat in a state of open war with capitalist society
- (4) General strike - revolution.³¹

In an article in Les Temps nouveaux in 1901, Delesalle identified and defined the trend to anti-authoritarian socialism, with which he had involved himself, as Proudhonism and showed how it had developed by

³⁰Sorel, "Avenir" in Matériaux, pp. 118-119, 133.

³¹Quoted in Jean Maitron, Le Syndicalisme révolutionnaire: Paul Delesalle (Paris: Les Editions ouvrières, 1952), p. 33.

opposition to the Marxists and Parliamentary socialists.³² A remarkable analysis for one so close to the movement!

Pouget was one of the first anarcho-syndicalists, having been in the 1890's the editor of a popular anarchist journal before becoming a leading syndicalist writer. He defined the syndicalist method which he derived from a threefold view of the syndicate: (a) a moral unit - an essential group which permits the worker to hold his head up to his exploiters, (b) a means of promoting coordination and solidarity among the workers, (c) most especially, a school of the will (*une école de volonté*). "Le 'connais-toi toi-même' de Socrate est, au syndicats, complète par le maxime, 'Fais tes affaires toi-même.' Le mouvement de syndicalisme révolutionnaire continue et amplifie l'oeuvre du premier Internationale, par une ascension à une volonté toujours plus consciente." Like Proudhon, Pouget also recognized the important place occupied by the peasant in the economic structure of France.³³

In the early 1900's the Confédération Générale du Travail was plagued with squabbles relating to its very nature. At a Congress in Amiens in 1906, the C. G. T. adopted what amounted to a declaration of independence for French trade unionism. The workers of France acknowledged themselves to be in revolt against all forms of capitalist exploitation and oppression, material and moral. The struggle should be manifested in the form of direct economic action against the employers so that the unions should not concern themselves with political parties

³² Ibid., p. 111.

³³ Quoted in Dolleans, Histoire du mouvement ouvrier, II, p. 124.

and sects. The double role of the union (le syndicat) was again confirmed. The union movement would seek coordination of workers' efforts to secure immediate gains, such as shortened working hours and higher wages. At the same time, the workers would be preparing for complete emancipation which they believed could be achieved only by expropriating the capitalist class. The general strike was endorsed as a means to that end. Echoing Proudhon's "L'atelier fera disparaître le gouvernement," the Charter of Amiens went on to say that the union, which was at present a fighting organization, a resistance group, would in the future be the organization for production and distribution, the basis for the re-structuring of society.³⁴

Jean Maitron thinks that the Charter of Amiens marks the birth of the new movement of revolutionary syndicalism by enunciating its doctrine.³⁵ That seems to be a rather arbitrary dividing point between anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism; the process of development seems to have been a gradual metamorphosis of one into the other as syndicalism became a more violent movement. Moreover, Sorel was writing at the same time as Pelloutier, and Delesalle and Pouget articulated their expressions of revolutionary syndicalism well in advance of 1906. The Charter of Amiens does mark the formal acceptance of this doctrine by the syndicalist movement. The real significance of Amiens does not lie in its designation as the breaking point between anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism, but rather in the severance of all ties

³⁴ The complete text of the Charter of Amiens can be found in Lorwin, French Labor Movement, pp. 312-13.

³⁵ Maitron, Delesalle, p. 32.

between French trade unionism and all political parties. This can only be interpreted as a victory for the Proudhonist tradition in French working class movements.

Moreover, as Maitron himself points out, the International anarchist congress held at Amsterdam in 1907 was well attended by French revolutionary syndicalists. Pierre Monatte, an eloquent young blacksmith's son from Auvergne, told the Congress that "revolutionary syndicalism is pure anarchism descended some degrees to become workers' anarchism." "Syndicalism has recalled anarchism to its working-class origins." It must, Monatte thought, remain politically independent and animated by a revolutionary spirit in order to function as a moral as well as a social force. "Syndicalism does not waste time promising the workers a paradise on earth; it calls on them to conquer it, and it assures them that that action will never be wholly in vain. It is a school of the will, of energy and of fruitful thought.... It is a flame, a spirit, a method of action." Created by the day-to-day actions of militant working people, syndicalism, according to Monatte, emanates from and identifies with philosophers.³⁶ Oddly enough, a French cooper's son some sixty years before had also thought that revolution must be rooted in ideas. There is no indication whatever that Monatte had read or was otherwise directly acquainted with Proudhon's thought. That his speech so closely parallels Proudhon's moralistic teachings is ample evidence of how deeply Proudhonism had penetrated the French working class mind.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 33. Also see Joll, The Anarchists, p. 204.

Around 1909 the anarchist tendencies in syndicalism began to decline as a result of disastrous strikes, and after 1914 the history of French syndicalism had little to do with the history of anarchism. Confronting the reality of the French government, the syndicalist movement was forced, in order to survive, to commit itself to reform rather than revolution, to negotiation with the state rather than its abolition.³⁷

Despite this trend, the Proudhonist influence upon the thinking of syndicalist leaders continued to be apparent. Léon Jouhaux, who openly acknowledged Proudhon and Pelloutier as his masters, was for nearly half a century one of the outstanding figures of the syndicalist movement. Even after the shattering, inhumane experiences of World War II, he was still giving voice to the anarchist dream:

When will men come together again in a world regenerated by labor freed from all servitude to join in singing in unison hymns to production and happiness? On this first day of the new year (1944) I want to believe in the coming of these new lights, as I do not wish to doubt the reason of man.³⁸

Proudhon had likewise not wanted to doubt man's reason, but that very faculty enabled him to understand himself well enough to know that he must.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 216-217.

³⁸Bernard Georges et Dénise Tintant, Léon Jouhaux; Cinquante ans de syndicalisme (2 tomes; Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1962), I, p. 3.

CHAPTER VII

THE BEGINNINGS OF A FRENCH SOCIALIST

PARTY: PROUDHONIST OVERTONES

The third major trend to emerge out of the repressions following the Paris Commune developed out of the tendency of some French workers to rely more and more on political parties as a means of bringing about reform. Considering the fact that Proudhon had been unalterably opposed to participation in political activities, one might think French socialist parties an unlikely place to seek Proudhonist influences. This argument can be countered with a reminder from Albert Richard, the Lyons collectivist who was Bakunin's friend, "One must not forget that it was with Mutualism, C'est-à-dire with the ideas of Proudhon, that the French workers began to place the first stones on which the edifice of worker socialism would rise. Before Proudhon, there had only been theoreticians without influence on the masses."¹ Besides, De la capacité politique had shown that Proudhon respected Tolain and other mutualists who felt that their participation in party politics was a necessity in order to assure representation of worker interests. Also most of the early socialist parties were formed by former Proudhonists who had been frustrated in their attempts to gain working class reforms by other

¹Albert Richard, "Les Debuts du parti socialiste français," Revue politique et parlementaire, XI (10 janvier 1897), 66-67.

methods.

The first socialist party to emerge in France grew out of the series of Labor Congresses which the government permitted trade unionists to hold after 1876. As a result of the 1879 Congress in Marseilles, a Fédération des Ouvriers Socialistes de France developed under the leadership of Jules Guesde, a former Proudhonist and ex-Communard, who by this time had developed decidedly Marxist tendencies. In 1882, Guesde formed the Parti Ouvrier Français in collaboration with Paul Lafarque, who was also a former Proudhonist. Proudhonism had been significant in introducing these two to concern for the working people and commitment to the proletarian movement. Insofar as it involved the Parti Ouvrier, Proudhon's influence was thus moral, rather than practical. The Parti Ouvrier was a tightly centralized, well-disciplined group designed to work in liaison with the Fédération Nationale de Syndicats in opposition to bourgeois parties. Guesde ridiculed the notion that workers' demands could be satisfied without a political organization and denounced the general strike as a "deceptive mirage."²

To Guesde's Marxist-type party was opposed the anti-authoritarian rivalry of Paul Brousse. Disappointed and disillusioned after L'Avant-Garde was suppressed and he was imprisoned, Brousse had gradually become a reformist seeking advances toward socialism through any available opportunities to promote social legislation and progressive municipal policies. In 1882 his Possibilist faction formed the Parti Ouvrier

²Le Socialiste, 16 octobre 1892, quoted in Goldberg, Jaures, p. 171.

Socialist Révolutionnaire. The decentralized structure of this party stood in sharp contrast to the Parti Ouvrier, and the party's reformist character became clear in the 1885 electoral programs. The new social order was to be achieved through peaceful, gradual socialization of the existing capitalist economy. Privately owned monopolies would be transformed into communal or departmental public services to be provided for all at cost prices or free of charge. These communes would establish municipal industries of every sort which the workers themselves would operate in the general interest of the community.³ The traces of Brousse's earlier Proudhonist affiliation are too readily apparent to be denied, especially in the insistence on the development of socialism on the local level and from the bottom up--that is, by the people themselves as opposed to authoritarian socialism imposed by a centralized leadership.

In 1890 the Possibilist party split when Jean Allemane, a former Communeard, led his left wing faction to found a new group, the Parti Ouvrier Socialist Révolutionnaire. The Possibilists immediately dropped Révolutionnaire from their official title to become the Parti Ouvrier Socialist. Allemane felt that the Possibilists had become indistinguishable from the bourgeois political parties and did not deserve to be called Révolutionnaire. The Allemanists believed workers should consider the use of all methods but should be wary of political action. Allemane warned, as had Proudhon, that workers' élu all too often become absorbed in their new role and forget their origins among the people. Notre

³Noland, French Socialist Party, p. 18.

Programme of the Parti Ouvrier Socialist Révolutionnaire called for the grouping of workers into labor unions for concerted action on the economic level, notably the general strike. Allemane, who wrote the Programme, was emphatic that the emancipation of the proletariat could only be accomplished by genuine workers, not by bourgeois intellectuals.⁴

"Pas de mains blanches, mais seulement les mains calleuses!"--The socialist slogan so popular during these years was particularly expressive of Allemanist sentiment.

In the mid-1880's Benoit Malon, another Communard and former Proudhonist, left the Guesdists to create a Society which could hopefully embrace all aspects of socialism. Malon was opposed to Guesde's rigid party discipline, for he had come to believe that socialists should not confine themselves to only one methodology. Since socialism involved every aspect of society, he thought socialist adherents should consider every method--economic, political, or otherwise--in the light of its possibility for service to the cause.⁵ His society of Integral Socialists was made up mostly of intellectuals and Parliamentary hopefuls. These later came to be known as the Independent Socialists and included both Alexandre Millerand and Jean Jaures.

Jaures' conversion to socialism was a steady gravitational process resulting from his reading of Marx, Proudhon, Malon, and other socialists. He came to the conclusion that the proletariat was the only class vitally interested in social justice, and this goal, he believed, could only be

⁴Ibid., pp. 28-24.

⁵Cole, The Second International, Part 1, pp. 330-331.

realized through an evolution of the entire Republic toward socialism. Jaurès, like Proudhon, was a moralist who believed that man, as a moralist, created history just as history had created man. He questioned the Marxist view of socialism as a function of history, believing it to be a function of morality instead.⁶ In an essay called "L'idéal de justice" published in La Dépêche, November 3, 1889, he posited the thesis that the real way to excite all the energy of national production was to develop in each worker all the confidence in himself as a man (valeur d'homme) that he contains. "From the point of view of economic interest as well as from moral concern, it is necessary to raise (constituer) all workers to the level of fully human individuals (état d'homme)." This ideal, he said, is now in the hearts of our people, and without it, a new generation could not survive.⁷

In "Socialism and Life" Jaurès had words of praise for Proudhon's criticism of property, interest, and profit. "The word which ought to have been spoken was uttered under the very dictum, the sharp inspiration of life itself." He also praised Proudhon for recognizing that the army of social democracy in France was composed of various elements--the factory workers, still weak in number and power; the lower middle class of petty manufacturers and small tradespeople; and the remains of an artisan class not yet absorbed by capitalism.⁸ Jaurès was not himself a Proudhonist--perhaps he had too much faith in the system--

⁶ Noland, French Socialist Party, p. 35; Goldberg, Jaurès, pp. 77-93.

⁷ Jean Jaurès, Pages choisies (Paris: F. Rieder et cie., 1922), pp. 172-176.

⁸ Jaurès, "L'idéal de justice" in Studies in Socialism, trans. by Mildred Minturn (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906), pp. 17-18.

but he was willing to acknowledge Proudhonian inspiration for his own Independent Socialist thought.

The various factions and component groups of French socialism did not unify themselves into a single Socialist Party until 1905. The classic struggle in the long process of unification was the question of alliance with other political parties and participation in administrative positions of the government. The inhibition that working class people should abstain from support of the existing government was so firmly entrenched in the socialist mind that it took a major European war to prove that loyalty to country was stronger than loyalty to class.

CONCLUSION

The impact of Proudhon upon the development of socialist thought influential on the working-class movements in France in the second half of the nineteenth century has been amply demonstrated. Proudhon himself wrote the first manifesto of the proletariat with a scientific and philosophical approach in 1840. Throughout the remainder of his life he concerned himself with the grievances of French working people and attempted to articulate their discontent in a doctrine that was flexible enough to be adaptable to changing circumstances. The French working people, already indoctrinated with Proudhonist thinking, thus found it easy to accept the theories of Bakunin, Kropotkin, Pelloutier, Sorel, Brousse, Allemane, Jaures, even Marx. But history proved Proudhon had been mistaken in believing the early antagonisms between the industrially dispossessed and the rest of society were irreconcilable. The State, in time, came to be a powerful protector of the proletariat, and working people became the nation. The Proudhonist tradition became submerged in other movements.

In the meantime, an international revolutionary workers' movement had developed from the impetus of the largely Proudhonian French labor movement. Proudhonist influence was felt, though often through indirect channels, in working class activities in Switzerland, Belgium, Spain, Italy, the United States and Mexico.

An area of his influence which is just beginning to be explored is

in Russia. Paul Avrich, an American scholar, believes that anarchists played a much more significant role in fomenting the Russian revolutions than any earlier study has indicated. Especially important was a trend toward anti-intellectualism which, Avrich believes, was partially imported into Russia from western Europe, notably through the anarchist tradition, Marxism, and French syndicalism!¹ He thinks Bakunin especially had a tremendous influence upon the development of Lenin's thought. In his April Theses of 1917 Lenin acknowledged that the Marxist vision of the ultimate society (a society of free and equal associations of producers unrestrained by any coercive political structure) was remarkably similar to that pictured by Proudhon and Bakunin!² Avrich also points out the similarities between the soviets and the syndicats.

In 1928 Raoul Labry did a study of Proudhon and Herzen that is basically a comparison of their respective philosophies and the definite establishment, from letters, diaries and notebooks, of the link between them. Labry concluded that Herzen was no mere disciple of Proudhon--he was too faithful to his own thought for that--but that the influence of Proudhon was too great to be ignored. Herzen assured the success of Proudhon in Russia, according to Labry, but his study does not go far enough to show how this influence penetrated the Populist movement; neither does it trace its evolution into Social Revolutionary thought. Proof is offered that Martov and Chernov read Proudhon and offered him as a guide to social research but Labry only hints at his impact on the

¹The formative influence of Proudhon on all three of these must be noted.

²V. I. Lenin, Sochineniia, XXI, 406, 436, quoted in Paul Avrich, The Russian Anarchists (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 129.

development of parties in Russia.³

The relationship between Proudhon and Tolstoy, another influence in Russian social dissent, has been inadequately investigated. It is known that Tolstoy absorbed Proudhonian criticism of property and government into his own non-violent anarchism. George Woodcock says Tolstoy was indebted to Proudhon for many of his theories of war and the nature of leadership as well as for the title of his best-known novel.⁴

Friedrich Engels, writing in 1887 in the Preface to the Second German Edition of The Housing Question, which he had written in 1872 as a refutation of Proudhon, said that Proudhonism had played much too significant a role in European working-class history to be allowed to fall into oblivion. Proudhon, he said, was deserving of periodic review if for no other reason than the fact that he represented the "vanquished standpoints" of a movement.⁵ Perhaps because the authoritarians won the great power battle against individualistic socialism, perhaps because a man's influence seems destined to wane unless it is institutionalized, the history of socialism has come to seem the history of various schools of Marxism. Not only is there an anarchist, Mutualist, anti-state tradition, but there is within the essence of the socialist creed a moral doctrine which was first enunciated by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.

Proudhon's entire existence was involved in the anguish of one question:

³Raoul Labry, Herzen et Proudhon (Paris: Editions Bossard, 1928).

⁴Woodcock, Proudhon, p. 279.

⁵Friedrich Engels, The Housing Question (Moscow: Cooperative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the USSR, 1935), p. 9.

"conscience et Liberté ou sacrifice de la personne d'une destinée collective?"⁶ He had the vision to foresee that the dilemma of the modern industrial world would be a moral dilemma, a crisis of faith. Proof of his insight can be found in a study of the French workingman before 1914.

⁶Quoted in Dolléans, Proudhon, p. 21.

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